European students’ decision-making processes when choosing to study in Australia and their travel behaviour during their stay

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European students’ decision-making processes when choosing to study in Australia and their travel behaviour during their stay

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Declaration of authorship

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be changed from time to time).

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Publications associated with this thesis

The following peer-reviewed conference papers are associated with this thesis:


- This paper is based on the interview findings and discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis.

Muschter, S 2014, ‘Factors that influence European international students to study in Australia’, paper presented to the 25th EAIE Conference, Istanbul, Turkey, 10-13 September 2013

- This paper is based on the interview findings and discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis.


- This paper is based on the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>Australian Education International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIEC</td>
<td>Australian International Education Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>AEN</td>
<td>Australian Education Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAUTHE</td>
<td>Council for Australian Tourism and Hospitality Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDM</td>
<td>Cognitive Decision-Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAAD</td>
<td>German Academic Exchange Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAIE</td>
<td>European Association of International Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELICOS</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERASMUS</td>
<td>European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
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<td>HEIs</td>
<td>Higher Education Institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICWE</td>
<td>International Conferences, Workshops and Exhibitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>International Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>International Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISANA</td>
<td>International Education Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAR</td>
<td>Missing Completely At Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOOCS</td>
<td>Massive Open Online Courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales, State on the east of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUAL</td>
<td>Qualitative method</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUAN</td>
<td>Quantitative method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLD</td>
<td>Queensland, State in the north-east of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCU</td>
<td>Southern Cross University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Standard Deviations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STCRC</td>
<td>Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRA</td>
<td>Tourism Research Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUI AG</td>
<td>Touristik Union International Aktiengesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFR</td>
<td>Visiting Friends and Relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Victoria, State in the south-east of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia, State on the west coast of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHV</td>
<td>Working Holiday Visa</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Tourism Organisation</td>
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Abstract

The international student market is highly competitive and ever changing. Prospective tertiary international students face a myriad of destination and institution choices. Existing studies on the decision-making process of international students offer a variety of reasons for why these students study overseas, addressing the financial, social and touristic benefits that international student education contributes to the host country. Yet, while a number of these studies have explored international students participating in whole degree programs, very little is known about students participating in short-term (temporary) study abroad programs. In order to remain competitive with other study abroad destinations and to identify advanced strategies to attract future international students to Australia, education and tourism marketers in Australia require a better understanding of students’ motivations and the factors influencing their decisions about where to study abroad.

Set within this context, this thesis aims to develop a better understanding of European tertiary students’ decision-making processes when selecting Australia as their temporary study abroad destination. In doing so the push and pull factors which influence European students’ selection of their host countries and institutions are examined. In addition, the extent to which students’ expectations about living, studying and travelling in Australia were met is assessed.

The push-pull theory of destination choice, the cognitive decision-making theory, and previous research on international students’ decision-making, underpin the conceptual framework which guides this study. Within this framework a qualitatively driven mixed-methods approach to data collection was employed. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 29 tertiary students from nine European countries before and after their study abroad semester in Australia. Building on the findings of the interview data, a quantitative survey was developed in order to triangulate the data and to test the generalisability of the key findings from the interviews among a larger European student population.
The findings reveal that European students are influenced to various degrees by diverse factors including location, academic, social and travel-related factors. It was also revealed that these factors were intertwined and overlapped during all stages of decision-making. While some of the findings resonate with the existing literature, this thesis contributes new insights and found that there are substantial differences between temporary study abroad students and students undertaking whole degree programs abroad. Although European students, like most international students, seek to enhance their academic, socio-cultural and English language skills, as well as their career prospects, this study revealed further key factors influencing their decision. The findings suggest that European students saw their study abroad semester in Australia as a great ‘once in a life-time’ opportunity combining studying, living and travelling in a country normally considered too far away and too expensive to visit.

In identifying the key decision-making factors and by focusing on European students, the study contributes to the field of international education and international students’ affairs by addressing a large gap that exists in relation to European students studying temporarily in Australia.
1 Historical developments and the internationalisation of higher education

1.1 Introduction

Travelling to foreign shores for education has been a common practice since medieval times. Now, more than ever, tertiary students are encouraged to undertake educational travel. Every year over four million tertiary students embark on a journey to study abroad (OECD 2014), choosing between destinations all over the world, including Australia, the country of focus in this study. International education and tourism are two of the world’s most long standing and dynamic industries and bring multiple economic and social benefits to host countries. In Australia, international education is a leading export industry contributing over A$15 billion in annual export income to the Australian economy (AEI 2014a). However, competition for international students has increased exponentially and if Australia is to remain a strong competitor in this global marketplace then a holistic understanding of students’ decision-making is needed. Study abroad combines both international education and tourism, however, the relationship between the two industries remains largely unexplored. Set within this context, this research project aims to develop a better understanding of European tertiary students’ decision-making processes when selecting Australia as their temporary study abroad destination, and investigates whether students’ living, study and travel expectations of their Australian sojourn are being met.

This chapter describes pertinent historical developments in international higher education and the more recent process of the internationalisation of higher education in which international student mobility is often considered the most apparent aspect of the internationalisation process of higher education systems (Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg 2012).
In the context of this study, student mobility involves the activities of tertiary students undertaking undergraduate or postgraduate degree study in a country other than their home country. Students can participate in student mobility programs for various durations which fall into two categories: short-term (temporary) mobility programs which include all programs without the purpose of a degree, and degree mobility programs where students study abroad for the purpose of (eventually) obtaining a degree (Cushner & Karim 2004; Freidheim 2012). The study that forms the basis of this thesis focuses on European students who participated in temporary or short-term mobility programs in which they were enrolled in an Australian institution for at least one academic semester or year as part of their home study curriculum. The students either participated in a study abroad program in Australia as an exchange student which was organised within the framework of an inter-institutional exchange program, or as a free-mover student acting on their own initiative. The different types of student mobility are discussed in detail in Section 2.2.

1.2 Student mobility in higher education: The global picture in a historical perspective

International higher education represents one of the most dynamic and resilient global industries in the world (Marginson 2011a; Streitwieser, Le & Rust 2012). Student mobility is not a new phenomenon. However, the social, political and practical contexts influencing students’ decision-making have changed considerably over time. To understand the current context of study abroad the following section provides a brief historical background to the key stages of development in international higher education. Given that this study is focused on European students studying in Australia, this historical background is presented with a particular focus on Western countries.

1.2.1 Historical developments of student mobility

The movement of students and scholars around the world in search of higher education and knowledge is not a new phenomenon and, in its various forms, has
been an important activity throughout the history of higher education (Gueruez 2008). While it is acknowledged that student mobility in other parts of the world may have preceded activity of this kind in Europe, for the purposes of this research, this section focuses on the European context.

Tertiary student mobility has increased considerably since the establishment of the first European universities including Bologna (Italy) in 1088, Paris (France) in 1160 and Oxford (England) in 1167 (De Ridder-Symoens 2003). By the Middle Ages, many universities had students and scholars from different countries in Europe. At certain times during this period international students accounted for as much as ten per cent of tertiary student enrolment numbers compared to almost three per cent worldwide today (Gueruez 2008).

From the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century, universities were established in most parts of Europe and the number increased from 28 in 1378 to 63 in 1500 (Verger 2003). Although travelling was difficult and arduous at this time a travel culture already existed in the medieval European universities. Students and teachers, predominantly from Scandinavia, Ireland, Scotland and Eastern Europe, regularly attended more than one institution and travelled around Europe on the way to other universities to study or teach. In the sixteenth century the number of mobile students increased further as foreign travel was now considered to be of educational value in humanistic studies (Rüegg et al. 1996).

By the seventeenth century international student mobility was an important aspect of university life as it provided a means of communication and knowledge exchange (Gueruez 2008). It was also during this time that the ‘Grand Tour’ became fashionable and prestigious, particularly for English aristocrats who sent their male progeny abroad to universities in European capitals to complete their classical education (Gueruez, 2008; Lewin, 2009). At the end of the seventeenth century and in the beginning of the eighteenth century, foreign student mobility decreased due to the European wars and restrictions introduced by home governments on holders of degrees from foreign countries (De Ridder-Symoens 2006).
Despite the devastating effects of wars during that time, students continued to travel across Europe in the eighteenth and all through the nineteenth century within the framework of the ‘Grand Tour’ (Lewin 2009). This individual mobility of students first began because students wanted to get degrees, while later the participation in the ‘Grand Tour’ was more seen as a period of ‘enlightenment’, mainly for pleasure (De Wit 2001, p. 12). Additionally, students from many countries outside Europe were sent by their governments and institutions to leading universities, primarily in Britain, France and Germany, to undertake parts of their education. These students and scholars provided an international exchange of research ideas and papers which can be identified as international aspects of higher education during this time (De Wit 2001).

By the first quarter of the twentieth century, institutions of higher education had been established in almost all parts of the world. Nevertheless, student mobility flows from Europe to America were still much higher than vice versa (Gueruez 2008). Britain, Germany and France remained the major hosting and generating countries for student mobility. However, the First World War (1914–1918) followed by the Great Depression in 1929 and the Second World War (1939–1945), collectively had a devastating effect on international student mobility not only in Europe, but also around the world (Klineberg & Hull 1976). For example, the number of international students in Germany dropped from almost 7,100 students in 1910 to just over 1,900 students in 1940, a decrease in the share of international students from 11% in 1910 to 4% in 1940 (Gueruez 2008, p. 165).

1.2.2 Tertiary student mobility since the 1950s

Student mobility before and between the two world wars was mainly established and driven by private initiatives underpinned by the libertarian rationale of peace and understanding (Gueruez 2008). This changed in the 1950s when student mobility initiatives predominantly shifted in the direction of more international cooperation and exchange in higher education, driven both by the foreign policies of the governments of developed countries, and by international organisations such as the
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank, and supra-national bodies like the European Union (EU) which started to take more interest in higher education (De Wit & Merkx 2012). For example, France and the United Kingdom introduced several aid scholarship programs for tertiary students from former colonies (Klineberg & Hull 1976). Australia also introduced educational aid programs for students particularly from countries in South and South East Asia. The aim of these initiatives, for example the Colombo Program, was to help foster international cooperation and economic development in these countries (Gueruez 2008).

Further, in the mid-1950s representatives of European universities met to reaffirm the potential for international cooperation and exchange programs for students and scholars among their educational institutions. By the end of the 1950s the United States also began to play a major role in the development of international student mobility through a variety of international programs such as the Fulbright program, which still exists today (De Wit 1995).

In the late 1970s, interest in the concept of internationalisation spread to higher education institutions, particularly in Europe. Representatives of the higher education sector shared ideas about internationalisation based on “a strong belief in exchange, understanding, and joint research among students and scholars as a means to support freedom and peace” (Brandenburg et al. 2013, p. 64). This was followed by the establishment of European programs for cooperation and exchange in education and research towards end of the 1980s.

In the 1990s student mobility in Europe was greatly increased with the help of the foundation of the ‘European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students’ (ERASMUS). ERASMUS is the world’s largest program promoting temporary student mobility (Teichler 2004b) and is of significance to this study as it has encouraged and facilitated the mobility of European students both within and beyond Europe. In addition, the introduction and implementation of the ‘Bologna Process’ (1999) and the ‘Lisbon Process’ (2001) influenced and shaped the internationalisation process of higher education, not only in European countries, but in many countries and tertiary
institutions beyond Europe as well. The aims of both initiatives were to enhance international competitiveness and quality, to promote the harmonisation of European higher education institutions and to bring about a further increase in student mobility (Huisman et al. 2012; Scott 2007).

An overview of the major initiatives and developments from the late 1980s until 2015 to promote student mobility and the internationalisation process of European higher education institution can be found in Appendix 1.

This section has highlighted key historical developments which shaped the current situation in Europe where students are encouraged to undertake study abroad not only within Europe but also to destinations outside of Europe, including Australia. Recent developments in international higher education and the process of internationalisation in academic institutions are discussed next with a particular focus on Europe and Australia.

1.2.3 The internationalisation process in higher education

International student mobility, with study abroad as one of its forms, is often considered the most apparent aspect of the internationalisation process of higher education (Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg 2012). However, the process of internationalisation refers to an integration of all aspects of higher education institutions that goes beyond national borders and is influenced by different national and international stakeholders (Teichler 2004a). The widely used term ‘internationalisation’ in the higher education context often refers to international education and research and is used to describe physical mobility, academic cooperation and the transfer of knowledge as well as border-crossing communication and discourse between universities around the world (Teichler 2004a).

While the internationalisation process of higher education has taken different forms, many countries have increased their focus on promoting international studies, educational exchange programs, and technical assistance since the early 1990s (Knight 2004). However, Altbach et al. (2010) pointed out that before the market for
international higher education expanded, four fundamental and interrelated forces influenced expenditure on higher education: the ‘massification’ of higher education, globalisation, the advent of the knowledge society, and the importance of research universities within it. Academic institutions around the world responded to these forces with a range of programs and initiatives which have shaped internationalisation of higher education. Two of these key forces, the worldwide ‘massification’, and the impacts of globalisation on the higher education sector, have arguably had the most significant impacts on international student mobility.

The ‘massification’ of higher education is attributed mainly to the overall worldwide population increase and the establishment of knowledge societies with an increasing use of information and communication technology which requires a greater pool of highly skilled people. The global number of domestic higher education enrolments increased from 68 million in 1991 to 152.5 million in 2007 (UNESCO 2009) and tertiary student numbers are forecast to increase to over 260 million by 2025 (Maslen 2012). This growth in demand for higher education coincides with a lack, particularly in developing countries, of the capacity to provide domestic education (Gueruez 2008; OECD 2013). Consequently, large numbers of students now undertake higher education abroad (Bhandari & Blumenthal 2011). Therefore, the large increase in the number of tertiary international students moving around the globe in search of education reflects a general increase in tertiary student numbers (Beerkens 2013).

The second fundamental force which influenced the demand for higher education programs are the economic, political and societal forces of globalisation. Altbach (2007, p. 260) defined globalisation in the tertiary education context as: “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education towards greater international involvement”. This involves broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education. It is agreed among scholars that the globalisation of societies and economies has had, and continues to have, enormous impacts on every education sector around the world, and particularly on the internationalisation process as they push higher education towards greater international involvement in a globalised world (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2010; Brandenburg et al. 2013; De Wit 2008; Knight 2006).
De Wit (2008) highlighted three ways in which globalisation and higher education are linked: First, the increased unmet demand for higher education in the developing world pushes students from countries with underdeveloped education systems abroad. On the other hand, Western countries which have a shortage of students due to their ageing populations are keen to attract international students. Moreover, the increasingly globalised economy has created a demand for new degrees and diploma courses, and also for lifelong learning programs. Second, new, and mostly private, providers have emerged on the higher education market on a national and international level. Third, the majority of innovative delivery methods, for example franchising and online distance programs for higher education, have been developed since the beginning of the 21st century, in which not only people but also programs and institutions cross national borders.

The globalisation of businesses and the interconnections between national economies have increased the demand for broader cultural experience and multilingual graduates. In order to interact with international partners, globally-oriented companies are looking for internationally-competent workers who speak foreign languages and have well-developed intercultural skills (OECD 2013). To address these global demands, governments and universities have implemented a variety of policies and programs, including the internationalisation of curricula, engaging in international partnerships, and setting up branch campuses overseas (Jones & Brown 2007; Knight 2012). Western universities in particular have expanded the availability of exchange programs and offer more flexible curricula through which students can combine study abroad with study in their home country.

Altogether, there are strong indications that many higher education institutions around the world have responded to the impacts of globalisation and a greater demand on higher education (De Wit 2008). Brandenburg et al. (2013, p. 68) highlight three main influences and developments over the last two decades that have shifted internationalisation from its rather marginal position to a central activity for most universities around the world. First, higher education has shifted from being a sector dedicated to knowledge production and exchange to a sector which is increasingly viewed as a commodity with a comparative trade advantage. For example, Australia
emerged as a major trader in international higher education in the 1990s and international higher education has since then contributed significantly to Australia’s economy. Australia’s role in international higher education is further discussed in the next chapter. Second, the introduction and implementation of the Bologna Process (1999) influenced and shaped the internationalisation process, not only in European, but also in many higher education institutions around the world. Third, the introduction and development of global rankings in the higher education sector has increased global competitiveness among universities.

All these factors have added new components to the multidimensional process of the internationalisation of higher education. The international dimension of higher education moved from small student exchange programs which impacted only on minor elite groups to a strong cultural, educational, technological and intellectual exchange across borders in which the recruitment of international students and staff has become a big business and a mass phenomenon in higher education (Brandenburg et al. 2013; Knight 2012). Therefore Knight (2012, p. 29) adapted one of her earlier, rather neutral definitions and redefined the internationalisation of higher education as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”.

However, globalisation and international trends have affected not only institutions and scholars but also students in the higher education market. Many tertiary students in developing and developed countries perceive studying abroad as an opportunity to extend their knowledge and skills beyond a level which is available at home, and they therefore see it as a way to enhance their career opportunities in a globalised work environment (OECD 2013). Furthermore, easily accessible information on higher education worldwide (Bourn 2011), and improved and expanded means of travel, have interacted to create an enormous global market for higher education (Gueruez 2008).
1.2.4 Current dimensions of the internationalisation process of higher education

Tertiary students now have a vast array of study destinations to choose from. It is not surprising that the number of tertiary students worldwide enrolled in educational institutions outside of their countries of origin has more than doubled from 2 million in 1999 to over 4.5 million in 2012 (OECD 2014). Besides the massive numbers of students physically moving around the globe each year to pursue study, there has also been an increasing development of campus-based international activities, cross-border education and joint/dual study programmes worldwide to facilitate and promote the process of internationalisation of higher education (De Wit 2011; Egron-Polak 2012). Furthermore, the influences of social media, the increase in online learning programs and the introduction of new open education resources such as massive open online courses (MOOCS), along with other new technologies, continue to grow in the second decade of the twenty-first century. All these factors will probably influence and change tertiary students decisions about whether to go and where to go to study abroad.

Another recent trend in the internationalisation of higher education institutions is the growth of courses in ‘English as a medium of instruction’ (Rigg 2013). As English is considered the global language in the business world, many tertiary institutions in non-English-speaking countries offer courses with English as the teaching medium in order to attract more national and international students (Crystal 2003; Lasanowski 2009). For example, by 2012 the total number of degrees taught completely in English had increased by 30%, and in Europe’s higher education institutions (HEIs) alone they had increased by 38% from 2011 to 2013 (OECD 2013). Improving English language skills is still one of the top reasons for tertiary students to study abroad, but if they can achieve that at home, it may result in less incentive to go abroad. Thus, the introduction of more English as the teaching medium might eventually decrease student mobility, particularly to English-speaking countries such as Australia. However, studies that contribute to understanding the connection between international education and travel will inform future marketing strategies which aim to attract prospective European students to continue to study abroad – rather than
learning English home – in places which offer both an educational and travel experiences, as is the case in Australia.

These recent developments will change learning and teaching opportunities as well as the forms of student mobility at HEIs, challenging traditional university models (Green, MF 2013; Lawton et al. 2013). Furthermore, times of economic uncertainty and crisis in Europe and other parts of the world, and the constant emergence of new challenges in the internationalisation process, as briefly outlined above, have created a tenser climate in higher education over the last years (De Wit & Hunter 2013). Today new, often for-profit, higher education providers have emerged and both private and public institutions strongly compete for academic talent, prestige, higher rankings, funding, research grants and outputs, and improved national and international reputations (Altbach & Knight 2007; Egron-Polak 2013). This is creating a more market-like environment within the higher education sector, and it influences how countries and their academic institutions profile themselves and compete for top students and academics at the national and international levels (Gibbs 2008; Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg 2012).

### 1.3 Student mobility: Current issues facing Australia

**Increasing competition for international students**

It is well documented that international students are a growing market for both the education and tourism industries in the countries where they study (Arcodia, Mei & Dickson 2005). In line with the overall growth of higher education as already outlined above, the global education and tourism industry has also expanded and changed significantly over the last twenty years (Dessoff 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that these industries have received significant policy attention from economic, academic, political and social perspectives (AEI 2006; Glover 2011b; Richards & Wilson 2004).

Today’s university students and youth travellers are considered the professional classes of tomorrow and the tourism consumers of the future (Morgan & Xu 2009). While undertaking educational travel, these students contribute significantly to their
host countries’ economies, as both international students and also as tourists (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). It is estimated that youth and student travel may constitute as much as 20% of all international travel, making student travel a multi-billion dollar business (Jianvittayakit & Dimanche 2010). However, to date few studies have established links between education and travel in the host country, despite suggestions by some researchers that both educational and travel-related factors may influence the destination choices of international students (Abbott & Ali 2010; Ali 2010; Glover 2011b). This study addresses this gap in understanding by focusing on the influence of travel-related factors on the decision-making processes of tertiary students wishing to study abroad, and also their travel behaviours when abroad.

With the expansion of international higher education and international student numbers, competition within this market has increased over the last decade. Countries such as China, India and Saudi Arabia have launched aggressive marketing campaigns to compete with countries that have traditionally been associated with receiving the highest proportions of international students, such as the US, the UK and Australia (OECD 2014). The OECD reports that opportunities for domestic study, particularly in developing countries, have increased (OECD 2014). Therefore, it is essential that these countries are equipped with better knowledge and understanding of international students’ choices and travel behaviour when studying abroad.

**International students in Australia: An income source for Australian universities**

In 2013–14 international students studying and living in Australia were contributing A$ 15.7 billion to the economy, with the higher education sector alone generating almost 70% of the total onshore earnings from international students (AEI 2014a). The majority of public universities obtain significant revenues from, and are dependent on, the income from full fee-paying international students. However, after a continual increase in annual foreign enrolment numbers that appears to have been taken for granted over the last two decades, Australian universities now face greater challenges in attracting international students (Marginson 2011b). Surprisingly, in 2011–2012 Australian international student numbers decreased significantly in all education areas compared to previous years due to a combination
of factors which will be further explored in Section 2.4. However, due mainly to the high demand by Chinese students, numbers of tertiary international students studying in Australia began to increase again by 2014–2015, and more international students than in any year in history started courses in Australian institutions in 2015 (Dodd 2015). But with ever-increasing competition from other countries Australia risks losing some of the international student market and this could have substantial negative effects on both universities and the broader tourism sector.

Many factors influence students’ decisions about which countries, universities and courses to choose when they study abroad. Therefore, it is essential that the education industry and those responsible for marketing international education in Australia understand how students from different cultural backgrounds make their decisions to study abroad (Marginson 2010). It is also vital that host institutions and travel operators are aware of the needs of this market and are equipped with the required knowledge in order to be able to facilitate a positive experience for international students.

**International students bringing social and cultural benefits to universities**

Aside from the income that international students provide for Australian universities, outbound mobility also enhances their opportunities for a deep engagement with other cultures and worldviews (Whitsed & Green 2015). Universities that understand the importance of multiculturalism and globalism are in general more attractive to international students as they have vibrant, multi-cultural campuses and classrooms where domestic and international students engage with each other. The benefits of a diverse learning environment go far beyond the classroom and are frequently important graduate attributes for both domestic and international students in higher education (Forsey, Broomhall & Davis 2011). Studying abroad is an opportunity that allows students to develop an international understanding by experiencing life in a new educational and cultural environment, and for domestic students, it provides an opportunity to experience other cultures (Asian Correspondent 2011). Thus, an important priority of the globalised education environment is to maintain diversity among students. Through greater understanding of international students’ decision-making processes and travel behaviours, Australian institutions will stand a better
chance of both attracting and successfully hosting international students, and encouraging diversity among their student cohorts.

Looking beyond the Asian international student market
At present, however, Australian universities predominantly attract and rely on Asian students. In 2010, 169,604 (68%) of the 242,711 international students in Australia’s HEIs were from seven Asian countries with China, India and Malaysia being the top three (Deloitte Access Economics 2011). However, after a decrease of almost 20% in international student visa applications in 2010–11, the risks involved in Australian universities depending primarily on attracting international students from a limited number of Asian countries, particularly China and India, was readily apparent. The significant decrease in enrolments occurred mainly in the Indian market, following racial attacks on Indian students in Melbourne in 2009 (AEI 2011). However, other factors added to the decrease in international student numbers, such as a change of visa regulations and the increase in the value of the Australian dollar. These factors will be outlined in the next chapter. To ensure that Australian universities can compete successfully with other global providers and attract international students from different countries and without depending on a few Asian markets, it is important to continuously monitor and understand the decision-making processes of a diverse range of nationalities to avoid the risk of overdependence on only a few markets.

The decision-making factors influencing international students are diverse and change over time. It is important for Australian universities to look to other markets, such as the European market. In 2010, approximately 10% of international students in Australia came from Europe. This is a small proportion of the total, but the number is growing (AEI 2010b). Europe and, in particular, the UK, Germany, France and Scandinavian countries, offer an increasing market for international education in Australia because of the growing tertiary education market in Europe, and the increasing opportunities for student exchange programs between Australia and European countries. The study presented in this thesis focuses on the European market and aims to identify the factors that cause students from the main source countries in Europe to study in Australia.
As well as the economic and social benefits that international students bring to Australian universities, these students also engage in travel and tourism activities while studying abroad. In order to create a clearer and more holistic picture of the travel behaviour of different international students in Australia, this study aims to add to the knowledge and understanding of why and how European students undertake temporary mobility programs in Australia. Consequently, this research attempts to contribute to an increased understanding of the decision-making processes of European international students in Australia. It also aims to provide detailed insights into their travel behaviour during their Australian sojourn. The importance of international students as tourists will be further outlined in Chapter 2.

1.4 Study aim and objectives

To ensure that Australian tertiary institutions can compete successfully in the global market and attract international students from a variety of countries beyond Asia, it is important to constantly monitor the aspects that influence the decision-making processes of all kinds of different groups of international students. This research views study abroad as a combined study and travel experience. Therefore, travel-related factors that influence students’ decision-making are examined as well as study-related factors.

Consequently, the overall aim of this study is to understand European students’ decisions to temporarily study in Australia and their travel and tourism behaviours while in Australia. In order to address the gaps in the literature described above, and to achieve the study aim, this study has four key objectives:

1) To examine the influences on and steps involved in European students’ decision-making processes when deciding to temporarily study in Australia.

2) To examine the relationships between international education and tourism from the perspective of European students who are undertaking educational travel within Australia.
3) To explore the extent to which European students’ expectations of life, study and travel in Australia are being met.

4) To make recommendations with regard to the marketing and recruitment strategies used by the Australian education and tourism markets to attract European tertiary students to study and travel in Australia.

1.5 Theoretical and methodological dimensions of this study

1.5.1 Theoretical foundations

The theoretical basis of this study is informed by the push-pull theory of destination choice, and by cognitive decision-making theory. The push-pull theory, which was derived originally from marketing theory, has been used as a theoretical framework in the international higher education area in order to measure and predict the factors that influence students’ decisions to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). The theory consists of two main elements: the ‘push’ and the ‘pull’ factors, which usually work in combination. In the study abroad context, the ‘push’ factors operate within the student’s home country and initiate their decision to undertake international study (Altbach, Kelly & Lulat 1985). The ‘pull’ factors operate within the host country and include all the various factors that influence international students in their selection of the host country, city and institution. The push and pull theory can be applied to identifying European students’ travel motivations and behaviour during their stays in Australia.

On the other hand, the cognitive decision-making theory (CDM theory) is one of the few decision-making theories which emphasises human cognition and follows a socio-cognitive approach (Gadomski 2006). The theory, which is sometimes referred to as a model, describes decision-making as a human mental process (cognitive process) which requires intelligence on the part of the decision-maker. The decision-making process results in the rational selection of a course of action from among
various alternative scenarios, and produces a final choice, which can be either an action or an opinion. According to Gadomski, the cognitive decision-making process begins when a choice is desired and no defined solution exists. CDM theory matches with the intention of this research, which focuses on the individual context of the decision-making processes of European international students. This study also seeks to integrate the different stages of the process, including: the time when these students first consider studying abroad, their search for information, their review and evaluation of their knowledge, and their final decisions about where and what to study.

These two theories provide a coherent and solid basis for a theoretical framework within which to examine the factors that influence European students’ decision-making processes to temporarily study abroad.

1.5.2 Method and analytic procedures

To achieve the aim and objectives of this research, this study adopts a qualitatively driven mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. Given the nature of the study area, which involves understanding the multiple realities of people’s subjective impressions and motivations, a social interpretive approach was first adopted to examining the decision-making processes of European students choosing to study in Australia. This was complemented by a post-positivist approach in the quantitative data collection phase (Neuman 2011). Rather than ground the research in a single theoretical paradigm, the interpretivist and post-positivist paradigms were combined in this study to utilise the strengths of both approaches, while at the same time overcoming some of the weaknesses associated with each (Creswell 2003). Three key stages of research are employed:

**Stage 1:** This exploratory stage reviewed educational policy documents, academic literature and national statistics in order to critically understand the policy environment and to describe the current profile of international students and some aspects of their behaviour as tourists in Australia (see Figure 1).
Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 29 tertiary students from nine European countries pre- and post their study abroad semester in Australia. Thematic analysis of a total of 58 interviews was undertaken to distil a number of key themes and sub-themes that enabled me to better understand students’ decision-making processes and travel behaviour while in Australia.

Stage 3: Building on the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview data gathered in Stage 2, a quantitative survey questionnaire was used to triangulate the data and to test if the identified dimensions and key findings from the interviews are generalisable among a broader European student population. In addition, the use of a survey enabled me to include a larger sample of European students via the collection of supplementary quantitative data. This made it possible to highlight possible emancipatory concerns to larger audiences, including those who value numbers (Creswell et al. 2006). The survey sample size was 194.
1.6 Rationale for this study: The value of international education to Australia and the importance of attracting multiple markets

The benefits of educating international students, and the fact that these students are a vital component of the tourism industry, are now well recognised in Australia and have generated research interest on international students (Glover 2011a). However, politicians, policy-makers and education and tourism providers in Australia would benefit from gaining a better understanding of what motivates students to undertake educational travel in Australia (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). To attract a wider variety of students, education and tourism providers require a comprehensive understanding of the different expectations, needs and views of prospective international educational tourists beyond the Asian market. Furthermore, a more nuanced understanding of students’ formative education and travel demands and experiences while studying in Australia will provide insight into the appropriate marketing strategies needed to attract international students in the future (Morgan & Xu 2009).

At present there is a paucity of research on the decision-making processes of international students, and this includes research into their decision-making about their tourism-related behaviour. It appears that tourism managers and education providers have failed to make the connection that educational choices may be influenced by tourism choices and vice versa (Davidson et al. 2010). The number of studies in this area which focus on regions other than Asia is limited. While this is understandable given that the largest proportion of international students studying in Australia is from Asia, it is difficult to apply the findings from Asia focused studies to other international student populations such as those from Europe (Arcodia, Mei & Dickson 2005).

In addition, interviews that I conducted previously with stakeholders in international education that informed my book Language travelling in Australia and New Zealand (Muschter 2009) have highlighted the inadequate understanding that Australian educational and tourism providers have of the needs of international educational
tourists, especially European international students. In order to understand the potential relationship between international education and tourism, there is a need to focus more on students by nationality rather than to view them as a homogenous market. For example, Shanka, Ali-Knight and Pope (2002) pointed out that cultural differences between Asian students and their European counterparts influence their travel behaviour in Australia. The preferences for Asian students to travel in groups and to stay in hotels/motels are different to European students who exhibit a preference for backpacker accommodation and for travelling on their own. The authors also confirmed the significant contributions international students make to the domestic travel market in Western Australia (WA).

Little research has been done so far into the slowly but unquestionably growing European international student market and their travel behaviour in Australia. Current assumptions are that the tourist behaviour of European students is very different to the behaviour of Asian students (Davidson et al. 2010). European students often come to study in Australia for different reasons than their Asian peers. For this reason, and because the distance to their home countries is much greater, their travel patterns while in Australia are different. European students tend to go on more trips, and longer trips, while in Australia. For example, like Shanka, Ali-Knight and Pope (2002) study, Davidson et.al (2010) also found that compared to Chinese students, European students are much less likely to travel with students of their own nationality, and prefer to stay in backpackers’ accommodation while Chinese students prefer to stay in hotels or motels. Furthermore, visiting friends and relatives from home (VFR) who visit European students usually stay longer and spend more money on tourism-related expenses than the VFRs of Chinese students do. Comparative studies need to investigate this phenomenon in order to better understand the differences between core markets (Gardiner, King & Wilkins 2013).

To date most studies have considered only a part of overseas students’ decision-making processes, such as how students choose a certain host country, and why they select a certain university or degree (Abbott & Doucouliagos 2009; Chew & Croy 2011; Doyle et al. 2010; Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). A more complete conceptual framework is needed to examine all stages of the
decision-making processes of temporary international students, and the connections between the different factors influencing their decisions.

The present study makes a contribution to existing knowledge by examining the processes involved in European students’ decisions to study abroad by examining not only the various stages of their decisions, but also the variety of academic, economic, socio-cultural and tourism-related factors involved in the selection of their host country and institution. This study also investigates whether students’ expectations of life, study and travel in Australia are being met. I argue that the holistic approach taken in the present study enables the generation of a comprehensive body of exploratory knowledge. This knowledge may serve as a platform for future research into more detailed aspects of the complex decision-making of tertiary international students who travel from different Western European countries to participate in temporary study programs in Australia.

The present study is also significant because of the knowledge it may generate that is relevant to practitioners, not only in the international education but also in the tourism sector. The research generates a comprehensive insight into the preferences and factors considered most important by European students when deciding: a) to temporarily study abroad in general and b) where to study abroad. Furthermore, by comparing students’ expectations with their actual experiences during their Australian sojourns, and by exploring their travel behaviour when in Australia, this study provides a better understanding of this student market. Such knowledge may facilitate more effective marketing initiatives designed to attract more European students to study in Australia, and it may also improve students’ overall study abroad experiences to ensure they become future advocates for Australia.

1.7 Definitions and major terms used in this study

There are different definitions and terms used in the international education context. For example, the terms ‘international’, ‘overseas’, ‘mobile’ and ‘foreign’ students are used differently in different education systems across the world. This creates challenges for the comparison of student mobility between countries (Verbik &
Lasanowski 2007). There is a lack of consistency in the use of terms in the policy statements of various countries as well as in the academic literature. In the Australian literature, the term ‘foreign’ student is often used, in US literature the terms ‘international’ or ‘internationally’ are used, and in the UK literature the term ‘overseas’ is more common (Huang 2008).

For the purposes of this study, a number of key terms are defined below:

- **European international students in Australia**: Students from different European countries who are enrolled in any tertiary degree programs in their home country and who are undertaking a temporary study program at an Australian institution for a period of one or two semesters. Therefore, this research excludes tertiary students who have enrolled in a complete degree program or an English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS), and those who undertake an internship or work-experience program. The European students researched in this study were studying full-time in Australia, participating either as free-movers or exchange students in a temporary mobility program.

- **Exchange students versus free-mover students**: Exchange students study in a student exchange program which is a negotiated partnership between two HEIs that results in an ongoing, administratively supported exchange of students who pursue equivalent but partial degree requirements for a fixed length of time (Teichler & Steube 1991). Free-mover students generally come from foreign universities which have no official exchange agreements with their Australian host universities. Their participation in a temporary mobile program can be a voluntary, or it may be a compulsory part of a student’s home degree with or without achieving study credits.

- **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Australia**: Australian institutions that offer international higher education programmes and services for both local and overseas students. All universities use English as their medium of teaching.

- **HEIs in Europe**: European institutions that offer international higher education programmes and services for both local and overseas students.
European universities generally use the national language or sometimes English as their medium of teaching.

- **Internationalisation in higher education**: “The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2004, p. 11). Two different streams of internationalisation activities in higher education can be distinguished: the activities that occur on the home campus, and activities that happen abroad. One approach to the internationalisation of higher education is seen in terms of providing funded programs that enable institutions and individuals to have opportunities to engage in international activities such as research, and scholarly collaboration (Knight 2004). **Temporary student mobility** programs are part of these institutional-level academic programs and activities and this is one of the aspects of internationalisation in higher education (De Wit 2011).

- **International (or mobile) students**: The literature identifies different flow patterns and types of international students, which are further outlined in Chapter 2. In this study the term ‘international students’ will be used relating to students “who undertake all or part of their higher education experience in a country other than their home country or who travel across a national boundary to a country other than their home country to undertake all or part of their higher education experience” (Project Atlas 2011, np).

- **Study abroad (SA)**: Is the overall term for an activity were international students travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study, either in a degree or temporary program (OECD 2014). However, in the European context study abroad is often used to refer to short-term student mobility.
1.8 Structure of this thesis

An overview of the thesis structure is outlined in Table 1.

Chapter 1 introduced the research by providing a background to the topic and an explanation of its significance. The research aim, along with the four objectives, were stated, and an overview of the methods and analytic procedures used to satisfy the study aim and objectives were presented. Further, the definitions of terms that will be used frequently in the thesis were given.

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature that informs the conceptual framework and policy context for this study. To better understand the specific context of international education in Australia, information of the global and Australian international education markets is presented. This chapter also reviews literature on the forms and flows of mobility, and the characteristics of international students. In addition, the connections between international education and tourism in Australia are explained.

Chapter 3 provides a literature review which underpins the theoretical foundations for this study. Moreover, it introduces the research context concerning the decision-making processes international students use to select their host country and institution by outlining the motivations, reasons and various factors which can influence this processes.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology, including the methodological approach and research techniques employed in this study to achieve the research objectives. First, a discussion of social science research methodologies leads to a justification for the sequential, mixed-method research design employed in the present study. Second, the design of the procedures of the qualitative data collection method and analysis of the data are described. Third, the quantitative data collection phase involving an online survey is outlined. Chapter Four also discusses the ethical considerations in this study.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 the results of both the qualitative and quantitative data collection phases are presented, followed by a discussion of the findings in
conjunction with the existing literature at the end of each chapter. Chapter 5 examines the information sources utilised in European students’ decision-making processes when choosing to study in Australia. Data pertaining to a variety of other factors influencing European students’ perceptions of study abroad destinations, and the steps involved in students’ decisions, are presented in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 provides data on the students’ life, study and travel experiences during their Australian sojourns.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by explaining the key findings of the research in relation to the four specific research objectives stated in Chapter 1. This chapter also reflects implications for theory and practice and what the findings might suggest for marketing strategies to attract more European students to study temporarily in Australia. The contributions of this research are outlined and a framework to capture the decision-making processes of temporary mobile students is presented. Finally, recommendations for further research are made.
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2 Study abroad: The European and Australian contexts

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature that informs the conceptual framework and policy context for this study. In order to better understand the context of international education in Australia, this chapter examines and synthesises the pertinent literature relating to international education in Australia and Europe. First, this chapter explains the different characteristics of international student mobility, the forms and flows of mobility, and the different types of international students. Second, the key literature relating to international higher education in Australia and Europe is examined. Third, this chapter outlines and examines the relationship between international education and tourism from the differing perspectives of European students who are undertaking educational travel within Australia. Finally, the importance of international students to the tourism and travel market within their host study country is discussed.

2.2 International student mobility in higher education

Students travelling abroad as part of their tertiary education have always been an important aspect of higher education (Gueruez 2008). The increase in international student numbers and the changing nature of student mobility are closely interlinked with developments in higher education. As discussed in the previous chapter, these changes have been influenced by various conditions such as the expansion of higher education, globalisation and the emergence of what is called the ‘knowledge society’ (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2010). In order to understand the decision-making processes of European students in selecting their study destinations it is important to understand the current context in which study abroad and student mobility are situated. Further, it should be acknowledged that international students are not a homogenous group and therefore it is important to distinguish between international
students depending on the mobility program they are undertaking, for example whether they study in degree or temporary mobility programs. Furthermore, it is important to take students’ social-cultural background into consideration, for example whether they come from developing or developed countries. A shortcoming in some existing studies has been that international students have been referred to as one group, and their significant differences have not been acknowledged. In order to differentiate clearly between groups of international students, and to explain the context of the group of interest in this study, the different types of international students are explained in the next section.

2.2.1 Forms of student mobility

Definitions of student mobility have changed over time in various research reports of international students’ numbers, and also between countries (Gueruez 2008). Unfortunately, there remains no globally agreed upon definition for student mobility, making it difficult to make accurate assessment of statistical data related to student mobility. In addition, student mobility involves many actors such as private or government educational advisers, and politicians and academics, often with multiple and sometimes competing interests. There is often confusion surrounding the many definitions and terms used in relevant reports, making it almost impossible to provide a clear picture of international student data and to compare data among countries in the past (De Wit 2008; Gueruez 2008; Lewin 2009). Depending on the context and country, an international student can also be described as a foreign, global, mobile, or outgoing student. To add to the confusion, student mobility in the study abroad context has also been described as international student exchange or mobility, consumption abroad, global studies or education, cross-border or transnational mobility, physical mobility, or foreign study.

In order to standardise the use of terms, UNESCO introduced the concept of ‘internationally mobile students’ in its Global Education Digest (2009). This term refers to individuals who leave their country or territory of origin and travel to another country or territory for the purpose of studying there. According to this
definition, students can be considered to be ‘mobile students’ if they are not permanent residents or citizens of the host country in which they pursue their studies. The OECD (2013, p.32) defines ‘international students’ as those “who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study” and only counts those students in their data statistics. Thus, students who undertake internationally oriented study programs ‘at home’ are often also referred to ‘non-mobile’ international students (e.g. cross-border/transnational education, branch campuses) and are not included in the official statistics of international students. However, as this student group is not a focus of this current research, the various forms of student mobility ‘at home’ are not further explained.

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, international students can be distinguished at the first level as ‘non-mobile international’ and ‘internationally mobile’ students and then further distinguished depending on the categories and varying durations of mobility programs (Cushner & Karim 2004; Freidheim 2012; Prazeres 2013).

Within the group of ‘internationally mobile students’, King et al. (2011) provide a further distinction within the three groups of degree/diploma, credit and voluntary student mobility. Degree mobility is related to students who are enrolled in an entire tertiary degree or diploma program abroad. Credit mobility refers to credit, temporary or short-term mobility, also known as study abroad, where students are enrolled in an institution in a foreign country for at least one academic semester or year as part of their home study curriculum. The authors referred to Voluntary mobility as study undertaken by students for a variety of personal reasons and can include all different mobility programs but is often related to work experience programs.
For the purpose of this study, I slightly adapted the categories suggested by King et al. (2011) in order to further differentiate temporary mobility between credit and non-credit mobility, as demonstrated in Figure 2 above. In my view, all credit or temporary mobility is not necessarily the same, as not all students study abroad in order to achieve credits for their home degree program. In this study, temporary mobility is referred to as the 'overhead category'. Thus, to temporarily study abroad can be a voluntary or a compulsory part of students’ home degrees with or without achieving study credits. Furthermore, the term 'short-term mobility' is considered too vague. To study abroad short-term in a three- or five-year degree program at home can mean anything from two weeks for some or five months for others. Furthermore, to participate in an overseas work experience program or in a language course or
summer school abroad can be a voluntary or a compulsory part of students’ home degree.

**Definitions of student mobility in the European context**

In the European context, the term *student mobility*, rather than study abroad, is the preferred term for short-term study or internship programs (Faist 2009; Teichler 2004b). These mobility programs are often part of an ongoing regular exchange framework which provides an organisational infrastructure to support the international study experience. Richters and Teichler (2006, p. 83) defined an internationally mobile student as “a student having crossed a national border in order to study or to undertake other study-related activities for at least a certain unit of a study program or a certain period of time in the country they have moved to”. However, the authors acknowledge some problems with that definition based on recent developments such as cross-border education, student mobility within countries, and internationally oriented study programs in a national context. Further, Richters and Teichler distinguished between different types of international students such as students who study in an international classroom but do not move at any time across borders and students who go abroad only for short-term study-related visits, for example summer programs, internships, language courses or group study tours. The authors also observed that reliable data for this last group are very hard to obtain and suggest instead the term ‘temporary mobility’ for those students (2006).

Within the context of student mobility, Richters and Teichler (2007, p. 458) introduced the terms ‘vertical mobility’ and ‘horizontal mobility’. ‘Vertical mobility’ describes students from developing countries going to more ‘academically advanced’ tertiary institutions in developed countries. ‘Horizontal mobility’ is understood as student mobility between countries and tertiary institutions of more or less the same level of economic advancement and academic quality. This ‘horizontal’ type of mobility within Europe can be referred to as ‘intra-European mobility’ where European tertiary students undertake parts of degrees or whole degrees in an institution in a European country other than their home country. This can be observed particularly in various regions within Europe where there is a long tradition
of study abroad programs (Rivza & Teichler 2007). For example, students move within German speaking countries such as Germany, Austria and parts of Switzerland, or within English-speaking countries such as England, Scotland and Ireland.

**Definitions of student mobility in the Australian context**

In Australia, international students are full fee-paying students studying on student visas in Australia (AEI 2013). This definition excludes New Zealand citizens because they do not require a visa to study in Australia. International students must have a valid visa for the duration of their studies in Australia. There are certain study visa categories for the higher education sector, for degree and non-award international students. However, visitor visas also permit up to three months’ study, and in addition, students from eligible countries can also study for up to four months on a Working Holiday Visa (WHV). Thus, international students undertaking a temporary study program (under four months) in Australia on either a visitor visa or a WHV are excluded from the statistics of the student visa category.

From an institutional perspective, as evidenced on the websites of most Australian universities and the Australian Government, the term study abroad students refers to students who enrol for one or two semesters and pay tuition to their host Australian university, but credit their study back to their home institutions (Austrade 2013). These students, called free-movers, generally come from foreign universities which have no official exchange agreement with their Australian host university. On the other hand, the Australian student exchange program is based on an official exchange agreement between an Australian and an overseas partner university. Exchange students pay tuition fees to their home university rather than their host university while studying at an Australian university. However, both students groups usually receive the same guidance and help from their host university upon their arrival.

This study focuses on European tertiary students studying temporarily in Australia for a minimum of three months and a maximum of twelve months. This falls under the category of ‘horizontal mobility’. In this thesis, the terms, ‘tertiary or higher education’, and ‘student mobility and study abroad’ are used interchangeably.
However, I refer only to temporary mobility, as I explained above that the term credit mobility can be misleading for my student group. Further, the European students in this research studied either as exchange or free-mover students in Australia, thus both terms are used. The difference between these student groups is that exchange students study within the context of specific university exchange programmes and receive financial and institutional support from their home universities. Exchange students also have a certainty that all study credits achieved in Australia will be recognised at their home university. In contrast, free-movers study in Australia on their own initiative with no certainty that their study credits will be recognised. However, they may also receive financial support from their home governments and cost-free guidance and organisational support from an educational agency in their home country instead.

2.2.2 Flows of international tertiary students

As discussed earlier, there is no standard global definition of ‘international students’. Many countries use their own categories and measurements to keep track of incoming and outgoing student numbers, making it almost impossible to provide consistent data on flows of international students (Gueruez 2008). Another data issue is that correct numbers on temporary mobility are limited as the official statistics collected by UNESCO, OECD and many countries usually do not include these students in their data (Prazeres 2013; Rivza & Teichler 2007). For example, UNESCO only collects data on international students studying in courses of more than two years’ duration, although temporary (credit) mobility rather than degree mobility has become the dominant form of outward student mobility in recent years (Nerlich 2015). In the UNESCO data, China is identified as the eighth-most popular destination for international students globally in 2012. In contrast, the Institute of International Education’s Project Atlas identified China as the third-most popular destination in 2012, as this alternative source of data counts all international students, not just those studying in degree programs.
Australia currently collects and publishes data on all incoming international students on student visas, regardless of their course program and duration (AEI 2013). However, as mentioned earlier, this excludes students from eligible countries who study for up to three months on a tourist visa and up to four months on a WHV in Australia. Thus, the correct number of international students who study for less than four months is not accurately identified. Furthermore, it must always be considered that although the proportion of international students in Australia, particularly of Asian students, has increased steadily in recent years, this needs to be seen in relation to the general growth of tertiary student numbers in the country (OECD 2013; Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg 2012).

**Current flows and generic demographics of international students**

In 2012, 4.5 million tertiary students worldwide were enrolled outside their country of citizenship (OECD 2014). According to the OECD statistics there was a five-fold increase of these students from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.3 million in 2011. As can be seen in Figure 3 below, the number of internationally mobile students worldwide increased by 3% between 1975 and 1980; by 34% between 1989 and 1994; and by 41% to at least 2.5 million between 1999 and 2004 (OECD 2013).

![Figure 3: Number of foreign tertiary education students enrolled outside their country of origin, 2000–2012](https://example.com/figure3)

*Source: Adapted from OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, Table C4, p. 361*
Most recently, between 2004 and 2012, the number of tertiary students worldwide enrolled in educational institutions outside of their country of origin increased by around 70% to over 4.5 million (OECD 2014). It is forecast that the number of students studying outside of their own countries will increase to almost six million by 2020 (Boehm, Follari & Hewett 2004).

However, in recent years the flow patterns of international students have been relatively stable. Nevertheless, there is still a large flow from the developing to the developed world, and a lot of movement between developed countries (De Wit 2008). Figure 4 below depicts the different flows of international students in relation to the living standards and levels of industrial production of their home countries and host countries. This adds another feature to distinguish forms of student mobility and faintly relates to the concept of ‘vertical and horizontal mobility’ introduced by Richters and Teichler (2007) and explained above. De Wit et al. concluded that the ‘North–South’ flows remain dominant as students from the ‘South’ are in search of skills, while students from the ‘North’ are attempting to aid in development assistance programs in developing countries.

![Figure 4: Flow patterns of international students from countries to countries]

*Note: Grey shading presents the scope of this study.
Source: Author, adapted from (De Wit 2008)*

The majority of internationally mobile students travel from the developing world to countries in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, with Europe and Asia being the major generating regions (OECD 2013). Student mobility, particularly among Asian countries, has seen the largest growth recently, and in 2012 accounted for 53% of foreign students enrolled worldwide, with the majority coming from China,
India and Korea. Lately, the ‘intra-Asian mobility’ and the ‘intra-European mobility’ of students has increased significantly (OECD 2014).

In 2012 most international students worldwide enrolled at tertiary institutions in countries belonging to the OECD. Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the United States together hosted over half of all international students studying in OECD countries (OECD 2014). As demonstrated in Figure 5 below, developed English-speaking countries, namely the US and UK, and other European countries such as Germany and France still attract most of the international student market (OECD 2014).

Figure 5: Distribution of foreign students in tertiary education by country of destination, 2012

An essential factor in international students’ choice of destination is the language spoken and used in university instruction as students prefer to choose a host country that speaks their native language or a language known to them (Norris & Steinberg 2008). Therefore, countries where the native language is commonly spoken worldwide (e.g. English, French, German and Spanish) remain the leading study abroad destinations (OECD 2013). In particular, the rise of English as the universal language is still reflected in the dominance of English-speaking study destinations, such as Australia, Canada, the UK and the United States. Furthermore, this trend
reflects that the majority of mobile students are likely to have learnt English as a second language at home and aim to improve their language skills through immersion in a native English-speaking country (Rigg 2013).

It is difficult to predict international student numbers. The demand might change in the future as new players enter the market and engage in global competition for international students. English-speaking study destinations will likely experience stagnation or even decline in international student numbers (OECD 2014). For example, as demonstrated in Figure 6 below, the share of international students in the United States dropped from 23% in 2000 to 16% in 2012. Germany and France also experienced a slight decrease of the international education market share from 2000 to 2012 (OECD 2014).

![Figure 6: International education market shares, between 2000 and 2012](source: Australian Government, Department of Education: Research Snapshot, (2014) as adapted from: Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators Chart C4.7, p. 353)

On the other hand, China saw total international student numbers increase by 12% from 2011 to 2012. In addition, other non-English-speaking countries in the Asia Pacific region such as South Korea and Malaysia, and also countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, have recently invested more into the internationalisation of their universities and offer courses in English to attract more national and international students (OECD 2014).
2.2.3 Current trends and challenges in student mobility

The number of mobile students did – and will probably continue to – rise as tertiary students have recently become increasingly mobile on a global scale (OECD 2014). Studying abroad is now perceived more the norm based on social expectations. However, this phenomenon probably applies more to students from developed than developing countries, and often more to privileged elites than to the majority (Lewin 2009).

It is widely agreed that studying abroad presents students first-hand with an opportunity to experience other cultures and learn approaches that are different from those in their home countries and universities. At the same time, there is a rising need not only to better prepare students for their study abroad experience, particularly for short-term abroad programs, but also to monitor students’ learning outcomes associated with increased cultural awareness and acquisition of international knowledge (Lewin 2009). In addition, greater attention is now paid by academic advisers to the aim that students can gain experiences which encourage them to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes to prepare them to work and live in a globalised and mobilised world, and to offer such experiences to all students, not only to a minority who are able to undertake study abroad experiences (Waechter 2013). Thus, many educational experts predict that the process of ‘internationalisation at home’ as well as ‘transnational’ or ‘border-crossing’ mobility of programs may become more important in the future than the physical mobility of students (Knight 2013; Scott 2013).

Despite all the positive outcomes of study abroad, and continuing intentions to boost study abroad participation among tertiary students, there are concerns about rising mobility programs and international student numbers (Lewin 2009). On the one hand, where there are high numbers of mobile students, there are usually also financial benefits involved. Lewin argues that as a result, commercial organisations develop and sell study abroad programs all around the globe. These ‘all inclusive-programs’ cover almost every eventuality to avoid risks or hurdles which may occur before or during studying abroad. These organisations have been criticised by...
different stakeholders as they do not leave much room for students to play an active role in decision-making and planning their study abroad sojourns (Lewin 2009).

On the other hand, in recent years higher education institutions and countries have spent huge amounts of money advertising their programs to attract foreign students for financial, reputational or other reasons as outlined in Section 2.3. This applies particularly to economically advanced countries like the United States, Australia, and the UK where international education has become a vital part of their economies’ and universities’ budgets. In these countries international students pay significantly higher study fees than national students, thus boosting universities’ budgets (OECD 2014). In other countries, such as China, India and a number of European countries which have lower or no tuition fees for international students, an increasing number of institutions attempt to attract more international students to enhance their academic reputations rather than their financial revenue, which in the future could also result in economic benefits. At the same time, administrative staff and academics are under pressure to constantly increase incoming and outgoing student numbers, which in some cases is achieved at the expense of academic integrity (Lewin 2009).

The presence of international students can bring immense value to host countries and academic institutions by making significant economic, academic and cultural contributions (Dessoff 2010). As mentioned above, many universities in Australia, Canada and the UK are nowadays heavily dependent on the tuition fees supplied by international students to balance their higher education budgets (Brandenburg et al. 2013; Davis 2009). In addition, international students bring several benefits to their host institutions and economies as they often supplement and diversify the labour force of their host countries’ declining and ageing population (Verbik & Lasanowski 2007). Furthermore, some international students participate in joint research programs or doctoral studies and often contribute substantial benefits to the research outputs and strengths of their host institutions (De Wit 2008). Thus, Western economies in particular introduce diplomatic and political considerations into their international education strategies in an attempt to recruit more international students and retain them after graduation to enhance their workforces (Huisman & Van der Wende 2004; Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg 2012). The
implementation of an Overseas Student Program by the Australian Government in the early 1950s, followed by many other political strategies since then, provides a good example for this (the following Section 2.3 outlines these developments in more detail).

Representatives of the international education market often admit that the most important factor driving global student mobility is the money international students supply to education systems (e.g. tuition fees) and to the country in general (e.g. living and travel costs) (Dessoff 2010). However, although the central rationale to attract overseas students may remain financial, there are non-economic factors as well (Bolsmann & Miller 2008). It has been outlined in Section 1.3 that international students bring a global perspective and a diversity of experience to their host institutions, which can have a positive effect on the learning and research environments (Forsey, Broomhall & Davis 2011). Further, international students enrich the communities of their host countries, bringing new ways of seeing things. In addition, there are also other idealistic reasons to support study abroad programs, because international students learn about other societies, which may later contribute to a global development, international trade and better international relations (Dessoff 2010). Taking all these aspects into consideration, it becomes clear why the competition for international students has increased significantly over the last two decades.

2.3 International higher education and study abroad: The Australian Context

This section provides an overview of developments in the Australian international education market and briefly examines the reasons for the changes in the international education market from 2009, with a focus on the international higher education sector.

International students in Australia can be divided between the sectors of higher education, ELICOS, Vocational Education and Training (VET), schools and the group of ‘other’ which includes foundational, enabling and non-award courses that do not lead
to a qualification under the Australian Qualification Framework (Deloitte Access Economics 2009).

2.3.1 Background to the Australian international higher education market (1950 to 1980)

The history of Australia’s international education engagements is short compared to the European history of student mobility. After the Second World War, Australia recognised the importance of supporting international education for tertiary students from developing countries, and decided to take part in the British Commonwealth’s humanitarian project commonly known as the Colombo Plan. The establishment of the Colombo Plan for ‘Cooperative Development in South and Southeast Asia’ in 1951 marked the formal beginning of direct sponsorship of overseas students for study in Australia, financed through the Australian Government (Bhandari & Blumenthal 2011). As part of this Colombo Plan, the Australian Government introduced an Overseas Student Program in 1951 as a form of humanitarian aid for overseas students, particularly those from South Asian and South East Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei (Meadows 2011). It was the start of the steady growth of international education in Australia and the commencement of the process of internationalisation for many Australian universities (Cuthbert, Smith & Boey 2008). In 1950 only 339 international students were studying in Australia under international aid programs such as the Colombo Plan. In 1959, this number grew to around 2650 students mainly studying in postgraduate degree programs (Gueruez 2008).

Foreign aid was the dominant driver of international education in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s where international students, particularly from Asian countries were sponsored to study or train in Australian tertiary institutions (Council of Australian Governments 2010). While the Colombo Plan was the largest aid program, other Australian Government–funded programs such as the ‘Australian International Award Scheme’ and the ‘Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan’ were also introduced to bring students from overseas to Australia (Meadows 2011). In addition, in the 1950s
Australian universities began to host international students who were permitted visas under the ‘private student program’ category. These international (private) students who gained entrance to Australia because they intended to apply for migration were admitted on the same fee conditions and entry requirements as Australian students. To attract these private students the Australian education market started an active recruitment of international students led by International Development Program (IDP) Education Australia, a not-for-profit organisation established in 1969 (IDP Education 2013).

During the 1960s tuition fees were still kept low for international students and often even waived to increase access and were eventually abolished by the Labor Government in 1974 (Gueruez 2008). In 1979 the Liberal Government under Malcolm Fraser re-introduced fees for private overseas students, under the Overseas Student Charge (Meadows 2011). This fee represented about 10% of the full cost of a university place for an Australian student in 1980 (A$1500–2500) and increased annually, reaching almost 55% of the study place costs by 1988 (Bhandari & Blumenthal 2011).

2.3.2 The change from ‘educational aid’ to ‘educational trade’ in the 1980s

In the early 1980s intermittent debates took place about the value of multiculturalism in Australia. These debates also included questions about the aims of the private Overseas Student Program and the directions of migration programs including international student migration (Meadows 2011). Furthermore, the Australian economy was becoming less able to compete with the rest of the world and Australia realised that in order to maintain standards of living it needed to boost its export earnings. In addition, the growing demands of international students placed increasing pressure on educational institutions and triggered a debate about the utility in public policy terms of subsidised study fees for private international students.
As a response to these new challenges the first parliamentary review of the Private Overseas Student Program was called by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in 1983 (Meadows 2011). At the same time, the Minister for Foreign Affairs appointed a Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program in order to evaluate all aspects and impacts of the program – for example its efficiency and geographic distribution. As a result, two important reviews were released in 1984. The first was the report of the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program chaired by a member of the Board of the Reserve Bank Sir Gordon Jackson. This was followed by the report of the Committee of Review of Private Overseas Policy a few weeks later, chaired by Professor Goldring from Macquarie University. The Jackson Report suggested that Australian aid for international education should be granted but expected that Asian countries would require less aid in the future. Therefore, education should be regarded as an export industry providing unrestricted entry of international students who were able to pay the full cost of their education (Harman 2005). On the other hand, the Goldring Committee dismissed the market-based approach to international education in Australia. The committee instead reaffirmed the value of the subsidised program to Australia’s broader interests. The committee saw the full cost recovery approach to international students as unpopular overseas and questioned whether a large number of international students were willing and able to pay their study costs.

Following the reviews in 1984, the Hawke Labor Government established an interdepartmental task force in order to deal with the two contradictory approaches to private overseas student entry in Australia (Meadows 2011). As a compromise, and responding to increasing pressure in the cabinet to cut expenditure on international students, the government followed the Jackson view. In 1985, significant changes, such as replacing the subsidised international student places with fee-paying student places, were introduced. This was the first step to transforming the Overseas Student Program from a philosophy of ‘educational aid’ to ‘educational trade’, popularly known as “the shift from aid to trade” (Meadows 2011).

Although the Australian Government continued to provide education as foreign aid assistance with a targeted number of scholarships, once the new ‘from aid to trade’
policy direction was released, Australia’s international education service and trade sector became increasingly commercialised and competitive (Banks & Olsen 2008; Cuthbert, Smith & Boey 2008). In the 1980s and 1990s, the Australian education sector became more diverse with more public and private providers enrolling an increasing number of fee-paying international students (Council of Australian Governments 2010). The Australian Government and universities started promoting international higher education services. For example, since 1988, the generic marketing of Australia as a study destination has been undertaken by Australian Education International (AEI), which is part of the Ministry of Education (AEI 2013). Among other objectives, the AEI, which since 2014 has been part of the Department of Education and Training, aims to foster ‘international partnerships, ensure quality, and enhance international students’ experiences’ in Australia in order to strengthen the international education market and to attract more international students to study in Australia. Beside AEI, other players emerged on the international student recruitment market including IDP Education Australia which today is jointly owned by 38 Australian universities, and SEEK limited. More private recruitment agencies have emerged around the world (IDP Education 2013). Thus, student numbers in higher education rose significantly between 1984 and 1990 from a total of 3500 to 25,000 international students with four in five of these students coming from Asia (Marginson 2011a; Meadows 2011). From 1998, the number of international students in Australia constantly increased from over 100,000 to over 600,000 students in 2009 (DET 2015b).

It is worth noting that since 1999 international students have been recognised not only as financial contributors but also as providing human capital potential as permanent skilled immigrants (Hawthorne 2007). In 2001, Australia’s migration policies were amended to enable international students with skills deemed in demand by Australia to apply for permanent residence after completing their studies (Meadows 2011).
2.3.3 Australia’s international higher education market in the 21st century

In the first decade of the twenty-first century the expansion of the Australian international education sector, reflected in the high percentage of international students compared to domestic students, had almost no equivalent in any other tertiary education sector in the world. The annual enrolment numbers of international students in all sectors have experienced strong growth, rising by around 12% per annum and having more than doubled from 2002 to 2009 (Marginson 2011a). As shown in Figure 7 below, international student enrolment numbers peaked at 630,729 in 2009, an increase of almost 17% on the previous year (DET 2015b).

**Figure 7**: International student enrolment numbers in Australia, 1994–2014
*Source: Australian Government, Department of Education (2015), International Student Enrolments, 1994-2014*

Furthermore, in 2009, international education in Australia was the fourth largest export market after coal, iron ore, and gold and the largest service-based export industry, contributing over A$18 billion in annual export income to the Australian economy (AEI 2010a). It appeared by the beginning of 2009 that this growth would continue into the future (Marginson 2011a). However, this was not the case.
Although the worldwide demand for international education was still strong in 2009, by the end of 2009 the upwards trend of the Australian international education market came to a halt (DET 2015b). Several studies have investigated the reasons for this downward trend and have acknowledged the changes in the Australian international education sector post-2009. For example, studies by Phillimore and Koshy (2010) and Marginson (2011a) found that Australia’s international education market came under pressure from global developments such as the impacts of the Global Financial Crisis, and increased competition from other countries. Furthermore, pressure came from several domestic developments such as:

- The effect of a stronger Australian dollar. As a consequence of the stronger Australian dollar, studying and living in Australia became more expensive for international students than in competitor countries such as the US and the UK (HSBC Group Australia 2013).

- Education sector ‘scams’ involving instances of dubious education agents mainly from South Asia and South East Asia, and corrupt practices in some educational institutions in Australia which were acting as so-called ‘visa-factories’ for international students by manipulating immigration rules and selling fake qualifications. As a consequence some of these bogus colleges were closed.

- The damage to Australia’s reputation as a safe study country caused by attacks on international (especially Indian) students. Dunn, Pelleri and Maeder-Han (2011) examined the pattern of violent assaults affecting South Asian students, particularly in Melbourne between 2008 and 2010. They argue that the racist aspects of these attacks were handled poorly by Australian authorities, which further damaged the confidence of international, particularly Indian, students that Australia was a safe country to study in. The former Minister for Tertiary Education, Chris Evans, responded to these events in 2010, admitting that not only were less reputable providers causing concerns over the quality of the Australian
international education market, but also that Australia’s reputation as a safe study destination had been tarnished by attacks on international students.

- Introduction of tougher regulations in the student visa application process, and restrictions to temporary student migration and steeper requirements for international graduates wishing to enter into permanent migration were announced by the government (Shams & Gide 2011). These new visa and migration regulations were introduced with the aim of improving the quality and reputation of Australian international education, and to avoid the increasing trend towards migration-oriented students undertaking courses primarily in hairdressing and cooking.

All the changes listed above occurred more or less together in the years of 2009 and 2010 and were impacting on Australia’s reputation relating to international education. As a result, students chose other countries to host their experience and international students’ commencement numbers dropped in the following three years (Marginson 2012). Since the peak in 2009, the total enrolment numbers of international students steadily decreased until 2012, particularly in the VET and ELICOS sector, falling to a low of 513,190 students enrolled in Australians institutions in 2012 (see Figure 7 above).

In 2010, Birrell and Smith expected that the decline in international student numbers might cause problems for many universities, as most receive between 15% and 20% of their total income from international students. In particular universities where international students account for over 35% of onshore enrolment numbers such as Bond University (QLD), RMIT University (VIC) and Murdoch University (WA) stand to lose significant income if international student numbers decrease (AEN 2015). Furthermore, Marginson (2011a) suggested that the sharp decrease in international student numbers will also have negative impacts on other economic areas such as the travel, housing and retail markets which particularly cater for international students.
In response to the declining international student numbers, government and educational organisations and providers worked together to improve the quality and integrity of the Australian education sector and to stop the decline of IS numbers. Initiatives included, for example, the implementation of the Council of Australian Government International Students Strategy for Australia (2010–2014) and changes to the Education Service for Overseas Students Act 2000. In addition, in 2010, the Department of Immigration and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) commissioned a review of the student visa system and work visa system for students post-study, which was conducted by Hon Michael Knight AO. The so-called ‘Knight Review’ was released in June 2011 and included 41 recommendations for reform. In September 2011, the government accepted most of the Knight Review’s recommendations and announced a number of incremental changes to improve the performance of the student visa system. These reforms included: the streamlining of visa processing by treating most students seeking to study at Australian universities as being low risk, widening work rights for all students visa holders and new work visas for graduates of universities in Australia which may last between two and four years (ABS 2011,np).

The international education industry, including staff, academics and members of student unions providing services for international students in Australia, were also proactive in addressing safety, work rights and other issues to improve the experience of IS in Australia, particularly after the events in 2009 and 2010. As a result, and as shown in Figure 7 above, after the decrease between 2010 and 2012, the overall international student enrolment numbers increased slightly in 2013 and more profoundly in 2014 when 589,860 international students from over 200 countries studied in Australia (DET 2015b). However, despite signs of a slow recovery in the international education industry student numbers have not returned to the same level as the peak in 2009.

The current Australia’s international education market – from an economic perspective

In 2014, with a population of just over 23.4 million people, Australia holds 5.5% of the world market in international education (AEI 2014b). However, as shown in Figure
export income from onshore (international) education services has dropped since their peak in 2009, with the lowest income of A$14.6 billion in the 2012–13 financial year.

Figure 8: Export income from onshore Education Service in Australia (2009–2014)
*Source: Australian Government, Department of Education: Research Snapshot, (2014)*

Nevertheless, in 2013–14 the contribution of the international education market to the Australian economy increased again. In 2013, international education was still a leading export industry and contributed over A$15.7 billion in annual export income to the Australian economy (AEI 2014a). The tertiary sector generated A$10.8 billion in export income, which represent 68.3% of the total onshore earnings in the financial year 2013–14. The situation in the international higher education sector in Australia will be further outlined below.

2.3.3.1 International students in the higher education sector

It must be noted here that the number of international student enrolments in Australia includes all enrolments of international students. For example, if the same student studied in the same year in two different courses such as first in ELICOS and then in a tertiary course on a student visa, this would be counted as two IS enrolments which can lead to confusion in reading IS numbers in different statistics.
Figure 7 (page 46) and Figure 9 below (shown in orange, below) show that the international higher education sector was not as significantly affected by a decrease of international student numbers between 2009 and 2012 as the other sectors, particularly the VET sector. In 2014, the higher education sector, including degree, postgraduate research and non-award segments, attracted the largest numbers of international students (almost 250,000 students), studying in Australia (DET 2015b).

![Figure 9: International student numbers in Australia (2003–2014)](image)

Source: Adapted from Australian Government, Department of Education: IS data, (2015)

Table 2 below shows the numbers of Australian visas granted to international students within the tertiary sector during the 2013–2014 financial year, including the top-five markets and the top-five European countries. Students from the top-five markets were all of Asian origin with over half of the visas granted within the top-five Asian countries to students from China, India and Vietnam. Visas granted for European tertiary students under this category came from the five top European markets: the UK, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden.
Table 2: Visa applications granted for international degree students in Australia, 2013–14, Extract from the top-five Asian and European countries (Frequency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>HEI’s Sector (Visa 573)</th>
<th>Postgraduate Sector (Visa574)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>50,124</td>
<td>1629</td>
<td>51,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>23796</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>24,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>9211</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>9804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>9239</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>9409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>6180</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>6724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All nationalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>163,665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


International students in non-award programs

In the context of international education in Australia, the visa category of non-award programs is designed for students who want to study at a participating university in Australia in a student exchange program or a study abroad program for a semester or a year, within which time they do not graduate, or, in other words, which does not lead to an award (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015a).

![Figure 10: IS studying in the non-award category, in Australia (2003–2014)](source)

Source: Adapted from Australian Government, Department of Education: IS data, (2015)
As seen in Figure 10 above, the number of international students studying in non-award programs in Australia also peaked in 2009 and then began to decline in the following three years but has increased substantially in 2014 to slightly over 34,000 students.

Table 3 below shows the number of visas in the non-award category granted for international students in Australia in the financial year of 2013–2014. In contrast to the international student numbers in the degree category, almost 11,850 students from the top-five markets came from non-Asian countries, with students from the US, Brazil, Canada and Germany leading this group. In comparison, there were around 1600 visas granted in the non-award category for students from the top-five Asian countries in this category.

Table 3: Numbers of non-award sector visa applications granted in Australia, 2007–08 and 2013–14, Extract from the 11 top countries (Frequency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Non-Award (Subclass 575) 2007-2008</th>
<th>Non-Award (Subclass 575) 2013-2014</th>
<th>%Change from 2007-08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>7779</td>
<td>5273</td>
<td>-32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>3096</td>
<td>925%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>156%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>-46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2350</td>
<td>1621</td>
<td>-31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All nationalities</td>
<td>Total 20781</td>
<td>Total 19,933</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Australian Government, Department of Education: IS data, (2015) (Student visa and Temporary Graduate visa programme trends, 2013-14, p. 29-31)

Note: International tertiary student numbers differ as Figure 9 presents the overall international students studying within the non-award visa category and Table 2 presents the numbers of visas granted for international students within the non-award category.

While the overall numbers for visas granted in the non-award visa category slightly increased from 2007–08 to 2013–14, there were significant differences between countries. While the number of students from the US and Germany decreased by over 30% in this time period, there was an increase in student numbers from all other
countries, particularly Brazil. Once again, the precise overall numbers of non-award/temporary mobility in Australia is not known, as students studying within the tourist or WHV visa category are unknown. Therefore, the data statistics provided by the Australian Government are only a picture of the minimum numbers of international student numbers in this category.

**European students studying in Australia**

Over the last two decades increasing numbers of European higher education students have been encouraged to take part in exchange programs outside of Europe, facilitated by financial support that arise from partnerships between European and non-European HEIs (European Commission 2014). It is likely that the mobility of European tertiary students to countries outside of Europe will increase in response to new bilateral agreements which have been recently signed up between the EU and some industrialised non-European countries such as Australia. These agreements are aimed at increasing student mobility by developing joint study programmes which recognise study credits and qualifications (European Commission 2013). Further, the extension of the ERASMUS program (ERASMUS+) has a strong international dimension in the field of higher education, including cooperation with Australia to enhance international credit mobility of students and staff (DET 2015a). This program allows European tertiary students to continue to be enrolled at their home university while studying abroad, for example in Australia, for a minimum of one semester with the security that study credits achieved abroad will be recognised as part of their home study program.

According to the data of the Australian Government (2015b, pp. 29-32), over 8700 European students were granted study visas in one of the three categories in the higher education sector during 2014 with the majority of students coming from Germany, the UK, France and Scandinavian countries. Given the growth in the overall number of European students choosing Australia, and the increasing number of opportunities to facilitate this experience for European students, this research is timely. Further, the continued growth of the European international student market represents a sustainable or long-term market for Australia to nurture, and so deeper
understanding of this market’s decision-making and travel behaviour will be invaluable.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Australia has been one of the most successful countries in terms of attracting international students over the last 25 years. However, the international education market in Australia has faced recent challenges with enrolment numbers decreasing in the years 2010 to 2012. Due to these issues Australia has redefined its approach and management of the international education sector over the last few years to secure Australia’s position as a leader in international education in the future. In 2015, Australia is home to some of the world’s leading education institutions and it is one of the global players in international education. For example, seven Australian universities made it in the top 100 of the QS World University Rankings 2014–15 (QS World University 2014). Only the US and the UK have more institutions in the top 100, and both countries have significantly higher tertiary student numbers and far more universities than Australia.

2.4 The connection between international education and tourism

International students represent a substantial segment of the travel population and are a growing market for the tourism industry in the country where they study (Arcodia, Mei & Dickson 2005). It is estimated that in 2010 the youth and student travel market constituted as much as 20% of all international travellers worldwide, making student travel a lucrative business (World Tourism Organisation 2012). Most trips by younger people are driven by aims such as the desire to work, study and explore new cultures (Weaver 2003). The direct connection between tourism and education is highlighted by study abroad programs, study tours, field trips, and other short-term travel-based educational initiatives undertaken by foreign tertiary students. Aside from the significant economic contribution tertiary international students make to their host universities and countries through expenditure on tuition fees, accommodation, retail, food, and entertainment, they also contribute to different areas of the tourism sector.
The following section provides a short overview of different definitions related to the student traveller segment. It also presents a review of the existing research on different aspects of travelling students, with a particular focus on international tertiary students and the Australian market.

2.4.1 International students in the tourism context – a definition approach

International higher education and tourism are two of the fastest growing service-based industries worldwide. They have substantial positive and negative impacts on the host destinations (Leiper 2004; Ritchie, Carr 2003; Weaver & Oppermann 2000). Tourism is a complex phenomenon, and has become a multi-sectoral and multi-faceted business over the last 30 years. Given the number of aspects involved in tourism it is not surprising that a wide variety of definitions of tourism have been used. These definitions vary according to whether the focus is on the demand side (the activities and type of tourist product consumers), the supply side (the tourism industry), or on other aspects such as different types of tourists (for example student travellers) (Ritchie, Carr & Cooper 2003). McIntosh, Goeldner and Ritchie (1995, p. 10) tried to include all the different aspects within a more systems-based approach and defined tourism as “the sum of phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments, and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors”.

However, a definition of tourism is dependent on the classification of the tourist and the different spatial, temporal and purposive criteria involved (Weaver 2003). To be defined as a tourist, a person’s trip needs to incorporate at least one overnight stay in a destination which is outside of their usual home environment (Ritchie, Carr & Cooper 2003; Weaver & Oppermann 2000). However, as for the term tourism, different definitions and terms are used for the term tourist. The academic literature refers to tourists as either ‘stayovers’ (minimum one overnight stay) or ‘excursionist’ (no overnight stay) (Weaver & Oppermann 2000). Besides the lengths of the trip, other components such as domestic or international, outbound or inbound tourists,
and the purpose (e.g. leisure, business or study) of the travel define tourism and the tourist in different categories.

Over the last 20 years, the tourism market has become more specialised resulting in the growth of niche markets such as adventure tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism and educational tourism (Ritchie, Carr & Cooper 2003). Educational tourism, which is the most relevant form of tourism to this study, has received more attention as the general interest in the concept of ‘learning while travelling’ has increased, particularly among young people. In addition, there has been a recent increase in more specially designed programs with the purpose of learning and travelling as part of studying for a degree (Jason et al. 2011). Moreover, the segment of youth and student travel is now widely recognised as an economically important segment of tourism since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) recognised as far back as 1963 that the international student was a type of tourist and this organisation viewed studying as one of the primary categories of travel purposes (1998). In later definitions, international students taking courses exceeding a year in duration were excluded, while students undertaking courses less than a year were defined as ‘tourists’. According to the definition by Kelly and Brown (2004, p. 11), an educational tourist can be defined as “a person who travels to an attraction or destination and participates, formally or informally, in a learning experience available there”. Students undertaking courses at universities or other study centres are ‘educational tourists’ because they travel to a destination to participate in formal learning experiences (Kelly & Brown 2004).

**Educational tourists**

Ritchie (2003) divided educational tourists into two types: ‘Education first’ and ‘tourism first’. ‘Education first’ means formal education and learning are the primary motivators for travel and this definition includes international students. ‘Tourism first’ means travel is the primary motivator of these educational tourists with the learning component being of secondary importance. Travel by students can be curriculum based (e.g. study’, fieldtrips’, internship abroad) or non-curriculum based
(e.g. domestic students travelling for leisure). From a demand perspective, domestic and international students comprise the largest market segment involved in educational tourism (Ritchie, Carr & Cooper 2003; World Tourism Organisation). However, although they might not see themselves as tourists, international students still have distinct tourism-related impacts and have specific touristic needs. For example, Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe (2008) have classified exchange students as ‘tourism first’ educational students, arguing that travel is the primary motivation for those students. Furthermore, they suggested that the criteria for the ‘education first’ and ‘tourism first’ categories need to be reassessed.

However, the term ‘educational tourist’ is not used in this study. Instead I continuously refer to ‘international students’ for two main reasons: Firstly, the investigation of the travel behaviour and the importance of travel opportunities in the decision-making processes of European students in Australia is only one aspect of this study, and it is not simply the primary focus. Secondly, the term ‘international students’ is used to avoid further confusion that could be caused by using yet another term for European students undertaking travel activities during their Australian sojourns. Furthermore, the terms ‘tourism first’ and ‘education first’ often overlap each other. For example, students travelling during their semester will be classified as ‘educational first’ tourists. But some of these students might have only decided to study in a particular host country because of certain travel opportunities offered by this country. While these students study for three or four months at their host university, they may travel for an even longer period in their host country before or after their semester. Therefore, there might be an equal importance to education and travel in some cases which is not captured in those terms.

**Categorising educational travel**

The literature in this research field of educational tourism falls mainly into two overarching areas: literature on ‘youth travel’ and more specific literature on ‘tertiary (international) student travel’. These categories often overlap. According to the WTO definition (2008, para.1, p. 1) the youth travel segment includes “all independent trips for periods of less than one year by people aged 16–29 which are motivated, in part or in full, by a desire to experience other cultures, build life experience and/or
benefit from formal and informal learning opportunities outside one’s usual environment”. The rather broad term youth travel is used more or less for travellers in the 16 and 30 age group (Carr 2003) including specific niche markets such as backpackers, those on working holidays, those taking gap years, schoolies or spring/summer break travellers as well as travellers participating in peace or community work on a voluntary basis (Richards 2005).

Tertiary student travellers come from a variety of age, socio-cultural, educational and economic backgrounds and may have different travel purposes (Carr 2003). Although an increasing number of more mature students do not fall into the youth category, the findings of the tourism student market are often reported under the umbrella of the youth and student travellers market (World Tourism Organisation 2008). This approach has been criticised as it is often not possible to directly compare the travel experiences of the youth segment with the experiences of the student segment.

The student segment mainly consists of domestic and international students studying, for example, at a college, a university, or a language school. They can either travel domestically or internationally, short- or long-term, for educational or non-educational (or combined) purposes (Carr 2003). Students can also travel independently or on organised tours, either alone or with friends, in groups or accompanied by relatives. Most often, their travel behaviour and purposes are a mix of the options mentioned above. Carr further divided student travellers who take advantage of the opportunity to travel as part of their degrees into the two groups of ‘spontaneous mobility’ and ‘organised mobility’. While students from the ‘spontaneous mobility’ group study and travel abroad without any prior inter-institutional agreements or financial support, students in the latter group go abroad based on an exchange program or other forms of inter-institutional or government agreements.

However, the current study only conducted research into European tertiary students studying temporarily at an Australia institution who may or may not have been participating in an exchange program. I refer to free-mover students instead of ‘spontaneous mobility’ students, and to exchange students instead of ‘organised
mobility’ students for two reasons. In my view ‘spontaneous mobility’ may give the misleading impression that these students decided spontaneously and within a short time to study abroad, which is not the case. Furthermore, international students not studying within an exchange program can also have their overseas study experience organised by a private agency instead of organising it themselves. However, the character of the European students participating in this research will be further outlined in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4).

2.4.2 International students as travellers

The selection of a study destination involves a large amount of information searching by prospective international students and they have access to similar sources of information as general tourists, such as destination marketing information, recommendations from family and friends, or agents (Wang & Davidson 2008). Motivators that ‘push’ someone to travel, include the need to escape, and for adventure, excitement and learning (Klenosky 2002; Leiper 2004). Attributes that ‘pull’ someone to travel to a certain destination include natural environment, culture, and climate. Both types of motivators are recognised as important (Dwyer & Kim 2003). Similar factors may attract students to study abroad as they often want to combine their study ambitions with travelling to make the most of their time abroad. These international students may also be attracted to travelling to a certain destination for leisure, excitement, adventure and/or to meet new people, and they consider factors similar to those that tourists do in their choice of destination (Richards & Wilson 2004; Teichler 2004b; Van Hoof & Verbeeten 2005). International students are generally motivated to engage in tourism activities as much as possible in order to gain a better understanding of their host country’s culture and people, to experience something new, or just to have a break from their studies (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008).

Whether engaged in shorter- or longer study programs abroad, international students often have a desire to participate in a combination of passive (relaxing), social (being with friends or relatives) and hedonistic (partying) activities during their
free time (Carr 2003; Richards & Wilson 2004). Compared to their domestic peers, international students usually live far away from family and friends, and often have minimal external commitments as employment is rare among international students, particularly for those engaging in temporary programs. Therefore, besides their study obligations, international students generally have spare time available prior to, during and on completion of their studies which they often use for leisure or travel activities (Davidson et al. 2010).

Although students often report that the combination of studying and travelling abroad broadened their horizons and that they became more open-minded, flexible and confident as a result of their travel experience (Jianvittayakit & Dimanche 2010; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008), not all international students are able to travel or are interested in travel. Davidson et al. (2010) stated that a lack of money and time can be major travel constraints for this group, and they face other travel barriers including a lack of knowledge of tourism activities and safety concerns.

2.4.3 The importance of international students to tourism

The majority of international students contribute significantly to the tourism sector of their host country by visiting tourist attractions and travelling for non-educational purposes (Weaver 2003). In addition, they often encourage visits from friends and/or family members (VFR) from their home country while studying abroad (Bischoff & Koenig-Lewis 2007; Davidson et al. 2010; Taylor, Shanka & Pope 2004). For example, in 2007, a study conducted by Tourism Australia suggested that for every two international students, one relative or friend visits Australia during the student’s stay in Australia. This type of traveller is estimated to contribute A$314.7 million to the Australian economy (TRA 2007). In addition, international students are not only future advocates who encourage others to travel to the country where they have studied abroad, but they may also become repeat visitors once they have returned home. For example, survey findings suggest that 64% of Chinese alumni had travelled back to Australia after they returned home after their study program in Australia (Pyke et al. 2013).
Although the international student tourism market segment is considered to make important economic contributions to host countries, this was not generally recognised by tourism providers and organisations as a niche market until recently (Ryan, C & Zhang 2007). The international student travel market was ignored for a long time because of the assumption that its market value was low and the perception that it is not as lucrative as other markets such as the package tour market (Babin & Kim 2001; Richards & Wilson 2004; Ryan, C & Zhang 2007; Weaver 2003). Thus, direct government policies, marketing and promotional efforts to stimulate this youth and student niche market are yet to be implemented in many countries (Ali 2010; Dionysopoulou & Mylonakis 2013; Richards 2005).

In Australia, the tourism industry is the nation’s largest service export earner, and therefore one of the most vital industry sectors in Australia. Results from the International Visitor Survey for the year ending in September 2014 show that international visitor arrivals in Australia increased by 8% to 6.3 million with international visitors spending A$30.7 billion in total trip expenditure (TRA 2014). Many businesses are associated with tourism-related industries which employ over 550,000 people.

The International Visitor Survey (2014) found that 21% of all international visitors to Australia stated ‘education’ as the main purpose of their visit to Australia (TRA 2014). Education is an important sector for the tourism industry, particularly in the fastest growing market of Chinese international students. In the year 2013–2014 (ending in September), the ‘education visitors’ share of tourist spending increased to $6.5 billion. A report by Access Economics in 2009 concluded that each overseas student, including their visiting friends and relatives, contributed an average of A$28,921 to the Australian economy. This leads to increased employment, not only in the education and tourism sectors but also in other sectors of the economy in Australia (Deloitte Access Economics 2009).

The student travel market is still growing and the contribution of international students to the domestic tourism industry in Australia is recognised in a number of studies (Davidson et al. 2010; Pearce & Son 2004; Weaver 2003). However, there is a
lack of academic research exploring the relationships between international education and tourism and little attention has been paid by tourism organisations to understanding the connection between education and tourism (Abbott & Ali 2010; Ali 2010; Arcodia, Mei & Dickson 2005; Forsey & Low 2013; Glover 2011b). These scholars have argued it is necessary to look beyond the academic aspects of international students’ experiences abroad and to also consider the students’ living and travel experiences. International students in their host countries are not only students; they are temporary migrants, consumers and often travellers as well.

Although stronger arguments and suggestions by policy-makers and stakeholders have highlighted that the combination of the two biggest service industries, education and tourism, is important for the future of both industries (AEI 2006), it appears that the Australian tourism industry, tourism bodies and organisations still face difficulties in understanding the requirements of international students due to a lack of research and information on international students’ travel patterns (Aaron-Tham 2006). The Australian tourism industry may have underestimated the international students’ significance to the tourism industry or it may have neglected the market because these students have not traditionally been conceptualised as a mainstream ‘tourist category’ (Arcodia, Mei & Dickson 2005). A study in 2013 found that the promotion of Australian international education and tourism are currently not well connected, although opportunities exist to promote Australia as a destination for both education and leisure (Pyke et al. 2013). Pyke et al.’s (2013) study identified several examples of the important role that can be played by local and state governments in making the connections between international education and the tourism industry. “The City of Melbourne and the City of Brisbane, for example, have both implemented ‘welcome’ and engagement initiatives, such as ambassadors and volunteer programs, and airport ‘welcome desks’, that serve the mutual interests of improving international students’ experiences and supporting their contributions to the economies of both cities” (Pyke et al 2013, p. 8).

In order to address the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1, this study is building on the findings of Pyke et al. (2013) as it is of interest in this study to further understand the connection between tourism and study abroad. This study also
follows Forsey and Low’s (2013) and Glover’s (2011b) suggestions to look beyond the academic aspects of students’ experiences abroad. Therefore, this study also considers European students’ living and travel experiences.

2.4.4 International students: Travel motivations and behaviour

Despite the previously discussed contributions of international students to the tourism market, the student traveller segment was overlooked as a research topic until the late 1990s (Arcodia, Mei & Dickson 2005; Weaver 2003). As the literature reviewed in this section will demonstrate, research on international tertiary students’ travel motivations, behaviour, patterns and requirements has only received systematic attention over the last decade. This recent body of research has contributed to a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of this segment of the travel population. Moreover, it has also been helped by the fact that the social and economic values of these international student travellers has recently been increasingly recognised by educational institutions, tourism providers, and official tourism organisations and governments worldwide (World Tourism Organisation 2008).

While many studies on the tertiary student travel group focus only on the travel aspects of international students who travel within their study host country (Aaron-Tham 2006; Davidson et al. 2010; Jason et al. 2011; Pearce & Son 2004; Ryan, C & Zhang 2007) others compare the travel behaviour of domestic and international students (Chen, BT & Lu 2010; Field, AM 1999; Kim, K & Joganatnam 2003; Kim, K & Joganatnan 2002; Xu, Morgan & Song 2009). Moreover, some studies have concentrated on specific groups of international students, for example, students undertaking language courses (Pearce & Hsu 2005) or internships abroad (Van ‘t Klooster et al. 2008). Some studies, such as Taylor, Shanka and Pope (2004) and Aaron-Tham (2006), have focused on the significance of tourism arising from VFR of international students in Australia. Although the economic impacts of these student traveller groups have been mentioned in most studies, some of the research focuses
directly on the economic contribution of international students travelling in their host countries, overlooking other aspects such as bringing a global perspective and diversity of experience to their host institutions (Ali 2010; Michael, Armstrong & King 2003; Musca, Shanka & Kandampully 1998; Weaver 2003).

Several studies have investigated the travel behaviour of international higher education students in the Australian context (Davidson et al. 2010; Gardiner, King & Wilkins 2013; Glover 2011a; Pearce & Hsu 2005). However, these studies, which will be discussed later in this section, all focused more on the travel behaviour of the Asian market as the majority of study participants came from Asian countries. This current study will instead explore the travel behaviour and travel constraints of European students in the Australian context as there is still a lack of information on the European student market.

2.4.4.1 Cross-cultural comparisons of travel behaviour

Most existing studies indicate that the marketers for student tourism products should not consider international students as a single market, and that it should be acknowledged that nationality and cultural background often affect the travel and leisure preferences of international students in their host countries (Glover 2011b; Kim, K & Jogaratnam 2003; Shoham, Schrage & Van Eeden 2004). To successfully attract and host international students, practitioners in the travel industry need to understand the differences between the travel behaviours of international students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and they need to tailor travel offers and also adapt strategies for each IS group separately. Accordingly, “Marketing campaigns should focus on educating people as to what travel has to offer and also to take into account that preferences are influenced by culture and background” (Shoham, Schrage & Van Eeden 2004, p. 9).

For example, Kim, K and Jogaratnam compared the travel motivations (2002) and travel preferences and behaviour (2003) of Asian and domestic students in the USA. The studies found that Asian students favoured city tours, sightseeing and travelling by plane or train whereas domestic students preferred moving around by bus to visit
rural and natural places. A similar study by Chen and Lu (2010) compared the travel motivations and leisure behaviour of Taiwanese students to other international students and domestic American graduates. The study findings on the travel activity preferences of Asian and American students are consistent with the findings from Kim, K and Jogaratnam mentioned above.

In addition, research was undertaken by Shoham, Schrage and Van Eeden (2004) to address the problems of cross-national differences and travel preferences of international students in three different countries: the US, South Africa, and Israel. The study found that national background and type of school affect the travel and leisure preferences of international college students and suggests that managers should examine individual national groups before designing marketing campaigns or travel packages for college student tourists. For example, the authors found that promoting sports to Israeli students as entertainment may be misguided because they prefer locations that promote nature- and culture-related activities. Students from South Africa preferred sport-related activities and did not show a high interest in nature activities when taking time out for leisure or travel activities.

As highlighted in the literature, there are differences not only between domestic and international students’ travel behaviour, but also among international student groups from different cultures and countries. Therefore, I have included students from different European countries in my study to investigate whether there are differences in the travel behaviours and preferences of students from different nationalities. Examining the travel behaviours of these European students in Australia offers an opportunity to compare the findings of this study with the existing literature which tends to be focused on Asian students. This will allow Australian markets and practitioners to better understand and cater for the European market.

2.4.4.2 The opportunity to travel as a key motivational factor in deciding where to study abroad

Llewellyn-Smith and McGabe (2008) presented findings from an exploratory study of students who completed an international exchange program at an Australian
university. The study investigated the motivations and factors considered in their selection of a university exchange program by using the push-pull model as a theoretical basis. The results indicated “that students' desire to travel and the opportunity for fun and excitement are the primary motivators for undertaking an educational exchange, along with the host country’s weather, natural environment and tourist attractions” (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008, p. 593). In another study, Jianvittayakit (2010) investigated travel motivation as a factor in international students’ choice for a university in Thailand. He found that almost a third of the participants indicated that tourist attractions in Thailand were the most influential factor in making a final decision to study in Thailand, followed by reasonable cost of study and cost of living. The study found that both push factors, such as the desire to travel and exploring other environments and social interactions, and pull factors, such as tourist attractions, were ranked as the most influential factors in encouraging students to temporarily study abroad and as highly influential in their choice of host destinations.

The benefits of travel during study abroad

Many studies have examined the impacts that a total study abroad experience may have on personal, academic, language and learning developments and outcomes, as well as the positive impacts on career and job opportunities. However, only a few studies have looked specifically at the impacts and benefits on students of travel experiences while studying abroad (Gmelch 1997). Gmelch (1997) suggests that travel experiences during a study abroad program often provide more benefits for the students’ personality and independence than the study abroad program itself. The participants in Gmelch’s study confirmed that they gained self-confidence and independence due to their travel abroad during which they either travelled on their own or in a group. Furthermore, as travelling is seldom predictable, they felt they became more adaptable and more able to cope with new, unfamiliar situations, changes or problems after their travel experiences. The results of Gmelch’s (1997) study also suggest that while studying abroad has well-known academic, language and cross-cultural learning impacts on students, travel and tourism experiences may have been more significant from a personal development perspective. The author
argued that the overall knowledge and memories gained from travelling may last longer than the academic knowledge received while studying at a foreign university.

In another study of American international students in Ireland, travel was examined as a means of learning about a culture (Langley & Breese 2005). The students reported that on the one hand, organised group travelling delivered more facts and knowledge about the Irish culture and enabled them to see more sights and tourist spots. On the other hand, travelling on their own offered more opportunities for observations and interactions and besides cultural learning the students developed more self-esteem and independence. Most students in Langley’s (2005) study said that they learnt more about the Irish culture on their serendipitous travels than in their lectures or on organised group tours.

**The Australian context**

One of the most comprehensive Australian studies into international student travel behaviour to date was carried out by Davidson et al. in 2010. This report, funded by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC), presents the first comprehensive tourism study of international students and their visiting friends and relatives around Australia. Through a series of focus groups and almost 6000 completed surveys, the study offers several key findings regarding the tourist behaviour among international students, particularly Asian students. For example, the study found that the majority of international students travelled while in Australia (85%) but their trips were usually relatively short, either day-trips (24%) or one to three days (38%). Furthermore, sightseeing and shopping were the most popular activities for international students in the area where they studied, but visiting natural attractions was most popular when travelling away. Most international students travelled in groups, particularly with friends, used cars or planes as the main forms of transport, and stayed in hostels. In addition it was found that 70% of students expected friends and/or family to visit them while in Australia and to travel together with them. However, almost 28% of the survey participants came from China and around 40% came from nine other Asian countries, whereas only 4.4% came from European countries including Germany, the UK and France. Thus, the overall findings are more representative of the Asian international student market in...
Australia. However, the study presented individual findings for students from China, India and Korea, and for the student groups from Europe and North America, revealing some important commonalities across the travel behaviour of international students, most of all their enthusiasm for seeing Australia and telling their friends and relatives about it. However, the study also revealed that the various source markets have some distinct characteristics. For example, while students from China (63%) prefer to travel with students from their own country, European students prefer to travel with international students from other countries (33%) or their friends and relatives who are not students (35%).

Two other studies utilised the data from the above mentioned study to further identify nationally-based differences between the travel behaviours of international students in Australia, and the factors that constrain their travel (Gardiner, King & Wilkins 2013; King, B & Gardiner 2013). Both studies offered more insights into the leisure and travel activities and behaviours of the Chinese students in Australia. In contrast to previous studies that have viewed international student travellers as a single market, both of these studies viewed the market as heterogeneous and as consisting of multiple sub-groups with distinguishing characteristics.

Earlier research was undertaken by Pearce and Son (2004) exploring international students’ images of Australia of several English language campuses in Sydney and Melbourne. The study compared the travel behaviour of international English language students to backpacker travellers in relation to tourist destinations visited, travel activities, and travel patterns including party size, type of transportation and accommodation. It was found that both groups wanted “to experience the Australian natural environment, they wanted to understand Australian culture and its lifestyle and they did participate in a wide range of activities” (Pearce & Son 2004, p. 341) However, the English language student travellers were more likely to travel with a large group of people, had a strong tendency to use public hotels or motels, and were more likely to be interested in city-based travel activities.
2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the background of the international higher education market from a global, European, and Australian perspective. It highlighted that in the 21st century more students than ever leave their home country to undertake tertiary education abroad. This has substantial economic, political and cultural impacts on the educational institutions and governments of countries which send and receive international students.

The value of international students to Australia’s education and tourism sectors was also highlighted. It was demonstrated that further growth of the international education market in Australia would likely contribute to a growth in the tourism sector. While it is generally agreed that a connection exists between international education and tourism, this chapter highlighted that there is a gap in knowledge and understanding of this connection. Moreover, there is a need to understand that international students are often influenced in their decisions about where to study abroad, not only by perceived benefits of their academic experiences, but also by the travel experiences they undertake during their study abroad sojourn. This study aims to shed light on this connection, and the relationship between international education and tourism is further explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Despite scholars’ growing interest in students as travellers, there is still a dearth of knowledge about the international student travel segment. A review of the existing literature related to this student segment indicates that studies exploring the travel motivations and behaviours of tertiary international students, are limited. This chapter showed that previous studies have tended to focus on international students from a particular country or ethnicity, or those studying at a specific institution or in a specific area. It was found that it is difficult to generalise findings from studies that have focused on international students at the same institution or in the same city, as certain travel barriers or incentives in this particular environment may have influenced the students’ travel behaviour. It was also highlighted in this chapter that that many Australian studies on the travel behaviour of international students have focused predominantly on Asian students. The small numbers of Australian studies
that have included European and non-Asian students in their research found differences in their travel behaviours. Although this Asian focus is logical given the high number of Asian students in Australia, understanding a broader community of international students would be beneficial to both the higher education and tourism sectors in Australia. It was also highlighted in this chapter why it is important to look beyond Australia’s current dependence on the Asian student market.

To address this gap in the literature, it is necessary to also consider smaller markets such as the European market which remains under-studied and overlooked from both an academic and an industry perspective. To the author’s knowledge, this is the first study to date which focuses a) solely on the European international students sector in Australia, and b) incorporates travel-related factors.

The research approach and methods used to explore the decision-making processes of European students and their travel behaviours are explained in Chapter 4. Before discussing the research approach and methods used in this study, it is necessary to discuss the relevant theories and concepts underlying the methodology. The overarching theoretical and conceptual context that the methodology is situated in is discussed next, in Chapter 3.
3 Conceptual framework

3.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this chapter is to establish an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. To achieve this aim, this chapter will critically review the existing literature to date to identify and discuss theories, concepts and models that explain international students’ decision-making processes when selecting a higher education institution abroad, with a particular focus on push-pull and cognitive decision-making theories.

The variety of factors influencing tertiary students’ mobility motivations and their ensuing selection of a host country and university are discussed in relation to how these factors can push students to study abroad and also pull them to a certain study destination. Different studies were taken into consideration, with a primary focus on the Western international student market to highlight the common understandings of what facilitates and influences the decision-making processes of international students, particularly European students. Finally, building on the key findings of this literature review the conceptual framework underpinning this study is described. While this study focuses specifically on temporary study abroad students’ decision-making processes, this chapter also reviews literature related to degree mobility students’ decision-making processes. In doing so, the conceptual framework is guided by the desire to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of international students’ decision-making processes.

3.2 Understanding student’s decision to study abroad

The process of decision-making has been defined as a ‘commitment to a course of action that is intended to produce a satisfying state of affairs’ (Yates, Veinott & Patalano 2003, p. 16). The decision-making processes of prospective international students in selecting a study abroad destination can be described as a conscious or
subconscious trade-off among a variety of attributes important to them (Maringe & Carter 2007).

The decision to study abroad is probably one of the most significant initiatives students may undertake during their tertiary studies (Mazzarol 1998). The relative uncertainty and importance of the outcome, and also the high financial costs involved which are either paid by the parents, the students themselves or by their home governments, make it a highly complex decision which takes place in different stages and often over a considerable period of time.

The decision relating to where to study abroad has important outcomes, not only for the individual student but also for the host country’s society and higher education institutions (Ryan, J 2011). As explained in Chapter 2, international students often provide a major source of financial, reputational and socio-cultural revenue for the country and the higher education institution where they study. Thus, understanding key motivators and factors that encourage student mobility, and the impediments that keep students home, are issues of concern for academics, policy-makers, universities and other key stakeholders (Teichler, Ferencz & Waechter 2011). Furthermore, it is also of interest to understand how the motivations and factors that influence prospective international students may vary among students from different countries and cultural backgrounds and also how they vary depending on the mobility program the students pursue (Carlson 2013). Knowledge of these factors will enable institutions to tailor their marketing and recruitment and service efforts to international students at a time of rising competition and limited financial resources (Li, Olson & Frieze 2013; Mpinganjira 2009).

Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino (2006) stated that there is limited literature concerning the decision-making processes of international students in general and that most of the existing studies tend to focus on factors related only to the academic host institution itself, and not on students’ selection of their host country. Most models that have been developed in this regard are implemented in studies which focus on prospective students’ intentions to choose a tertiary institution either at home (Moogan, Baron & Harris 1999; Perna 2006; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi 2010; Raposo
& Alves 2007; Somers et al. 2006) or abroad (Cubillo et al. 2005; Lawley & Perry 1998; Park 2009; Salisbury, Paulsen & Pascarella 2010; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth 2002; Yang 2013). Other researchers have developed models to describe the factors that influence international students’ decision-making processes retrospectively (Dahari & Abduh 2011; Rees 2002; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor 2005). Other research has tended to focus on the various positive outcomes of study abroad participation (Franklin 2010; Magnan & Back 2007; Maiworm & Teichler 1996; Salisbury, 2010). Limited attention has been devoted to studying how students’ personal, social, economic and cultural contexts and their social relations with other people such as family, friends, peer students, education agencies and academic advisers, shape their decisions to study abroad (Jung et al. 2011).

In addition, most existing research does not acknowledge how influences vary in importance according to the different stages of decision-making (Salisbury et al. 2009). Moreover, current research often does not reflect on the cultural background of the participants or the particular study abroad program the students undertook, assuming that regardless of students’ ethnic and cultural backgrounds, or educational programs, they are influenced by similar factors when deciding to undertake education abroad.

I view these approaches critically and suggest that that the whole decision-making process should be studied in order to understand what drives international students’ destination choices. Furthermore, I consider that there are great motivational differences among students from different cultural backgrounds. I also consider that there are motivational differences depending on the kind of mobility program students participate in when studying abroad, such as studying in a degree versus a temporary mobility program. Consequently, this study aims to investigate factors influencing students’ decisions by looking at all the different stages of student decision-making process, including their general decision to study abroad and their subsequent choice of host country, city and also institution. In addition, this research focuses solely on European students from a Western cultural background who participated in a temporary mobility program in Australia, either as exchange or free-mover students.
However, critically understanding the comprehensive decision-making processes which lead students choose a particular study destination and host university is a complex process in itself, and the existing literature does not present a ‘golden rule’ of how to complete this task. Rather, scholars have developed different theoretical approaches to understand and explain the complex student decision-making process. Among the most common theories applied in the area of student decision-making in the selection of a higher education institution at home or abroad are the set of cognitive decision-making theories (Kotler & Fox 1995), the college choice theory (Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper 1998), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen, Czasch & Flood 2009; Gatfield & Chen 2006), and Rogers’ (2010) ‘Innovation Decision Process’. In addition, marketing theories involving service quality and customer satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall 2006; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1996), consumer behaviour theories (Thaler 1980), and the push-pull theory (Lakshmana Rao 1979; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; McMahon 1992) have also been employed to understand students’ decision-making processes.

While some studies on this topic do not appear to be guided by an explicit theory, this study draws upon the push-pull theory of destination choice and the cognitive decision-making theory (CDM theory) to create an integrated conceptual framework. These theories and their relevance to this study are discussed next.

3.3 Overarching theoretical foundation: The push-pull theory of destination choice

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws primarily from the push-pull theory of destination choice and also upon the CDM theory. These two theories were selected because they both seek to explain the factors which encourage and attract international students to select Australia as a study destination. These two theories are complementary as they focus on different, but related aspects of the decision-making processes of international students. The key characteristics of these theories and their relevance to this research are discussed next.
Taking into consideration the different aspects of the decision-making process of prospective international students, it is clear that a comprehensive research approach is required to capture all factors involved in this process. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there is a shortage of theoretical models which attempt to portray the decision-making processes of international students who participate in temporary mobility programs. In addition, only a few studies have incorporated the potential influence of tourism and travel factors in the host country. Furthermore, no previous research has been conducted which examines European students’ decisions to study in Australia, their expectations and experiences of studying in Australia and their ensuing travel behaviour during their stay.

The push-pull theory of destination choice was first used by demographer Lee (1966) to describe immigration patterns in the United States. Within tourism research, the theory was introduced by Dann (1977), following Toman’s work on the ‘push-pull factor’ compendium theory in 1959 as cited in Uysal, Li and Sirakaya-Turk (2008, pp. 413-414). Dann suggested that there is a distinction between the reasons which push people to travel, for example escape, and the factors that attract (pull) tourists to a destination such as the warmer weather and the ocean. According to the push-pull theory, socio-psychological, intrinsic and intangible push forces motivate people to travel (Yoon & Uysal 2005). On the other hand, attributes that enable tourists to satisfy their unmet needs pull them to a destination.

The theory consists of two main elements; one focuses on whether to go, termed as the ‘push’ factors, and the other on where to go, termed as the ‘pull’ factors. These push-pull factors usually work in conjunction with one another (Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk 2008). In other words, individuals are influenced by motivational variables that push them into making a decision about whether to travel, work, migrate or study abroad and are attracted to go to a particular destination by several pull factors.

The theory (also referred to as the push-pull model) became more popular in the international student context when Lakshmana (1979) used it to investigate the intentions of students from developing countries to study abroad. In his book *Brain Drain and Foreign Students*, Lakshmana (1979) compared data from a survey of
international students in Australia conducted from 1973–1975 with data obtained from similar surveys in the US, Canada, and France. The findings suggested that the attitudes, experiences, and future career plans of international students studying in developed countries were very similar. Lakshmana also noted the negative consequences of push-pull forces that encourage the flow of students from developing countries to study in developed countries which offer better education and greater financial rewards to graduates.

The push-pull theory has frequently been revisited by academics from diverse disciplines in order to analyse the various internal forces that push students to study abroad and the external forces of a destination and its attributes that pull students to a particular host country and institution. In the study abroad context, push factors operate within the student’s home country and initiate the decision to undertake international study (Altbach, Kelly & Lulat 1985). Pull factors operate within the host country and include the several factors that make a country, city and institution attractive to international students. However, most studies to date have focused on students who either intended to obtain an academic degree abroad or where already studying in a degree program abroad. Few studies have included students participating in temporary study abroad programs. Therefore, to develop an understanding of the major differences between push and pull factors that influence students to study abroad for a complete degree program and those that influence temporary study abroad students, research on international degree students is also incorporated in the literature review.

### 3.3.1 Economic, political and educational push and pull factors

One of the earliest comprehensive studies involving the decision-making processes of international degree students utilising the push-pull theory was conducted by Altbach, Kelly and Lulat (1985). The research provided an overview of the variables affecting the direction of international students’ flow patterns from some, particularly developing, countries, distinguishing between ‘home and host country
variables’ (Altbach, Kelly & Lulat 1985, p. 11). In terms of home country variables (factors which pushed students out of their home countries to study abroad), the research found that factors were related to economic, political and educational restrictions or difficulties in the students’ home country, such as insufficient opportunities to carry out research. In terms of host destination variables, the study identified, for example, financial study support for international students, a stable political environment in the host country, and good quality of higher education as factors which pull students to certain foreign countries and universities. Furthermore, the authors identified eight different flow patterns of international students. For example, the major flows of international students have been from developing nations to the industrialised market-economy nations, and between industrialised nations. Altbach, Kelly and Lulat (1985) noted that existing research at the time was largely concerned with broader economic policy issues and that literature on international students was limited. They also observed that there was a need to better understand the economic impacts of specific international student populations on academic institutions and the individual economic circumstances of international students. Altbach, Kelly and Lulat (1985) called for more attention to be given to the provision of relevant research and analysis, as international education is a key issue in post-secondary education worldwide. This sparked increased research interest in this area over the following years.

From the macro perspective, many studies carried out from the 1960s to the 1980s took economic and political approaches to examining international student flows (Chen, L-H 2006). Consequently, the dominant themes which emerged from this earlier research were related to the accessibility of higher education which pushed students out of their developing home countries to study in developed countries which offered students a better economic situation and often the opportunity to migrate to their developed host countries. For example, McMahon (1992) compared the flow of students from 18 developing countries who were studying abroad in the 1960s and 1970s in developed countries, particularly in the US. This retrospective study identified that one of the most important push factors to obtain an academic qualification abroad is a lack of educational capabilities and economic restrictions

Conceptual framework
within the home country. The most important pull factors which determined international study patterns were related to a strong economy in, and the level of financial support provided by, the host country, as well as political and cultural links between the host and the home country. McMahon’s (1992) study is valuable in that it explains the global patterns of international student flow and her push-pull model has served as the basis for many subsequent studies on international student choice. However, the study lacks information about the factors influencing international students’ decision-making processes.

The first studies to incorporate push and pull factors were predominantly focused on economic and political factors. Given that the students of interest where from developing countries, this is understandable. However, while later studies recognised that other factors such as educational and socio-cultural factors were also influential in students’ choices of destinations, a stable political environment and personal safety are still issues of concern for some prospective international students and their parents (Lawley & Perry 1998; Mazzarol et al. 2001; Smart & Ang 1992). The broader spectrum of push and pull factors acknowledged in more recent studies, as well as in this study, are discussed next.

3.3.2 Push-pull factors: A broader perspective

Post-1990s studies that used the push-pull theory of destination choice to understand the decision-making process of international students took a broader perspective and incorporated factors other than accessibility of education and economics. Although some of these studies integrated students from more than one home or host country, most were still focused on students from developing countries. For example, in 1997, Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery examined factors which influenced international students’ destination choices in four different education sectors (higher education, ELICOS, VET and schools). The authors were particularly interested in why students from Taiwan and Indonesia did not choose to study in Australia. Their mixed-methods study wanted to address the major weakness of former studies which investigated the reasons for choosing Australia but had failed to investigate why
students do not choose Australia as their preferred study destination. The study found several pull factors related to the host country which influenced students’ choices of their study destination, including:

- access to information about a host country
- reputation for quality of higher education in host country and recognition of educational qualification in students’ home country
- personal recommendations of, or existing social links to, the study destination (family, friends or other ‘gatekeepers’)
- affordability (e.g. study, living, travel costs) and lifestyle
- geographic proximity to home, the physical climate and lifestyle of the host country.

A finding from Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery (1997) study was that students from Taiwan were strongly oriented towards the US and away from Australia. Greater access to information concerning education courses and institutions in the US, and a lack of information concerning Australia as a supplier of high quality education courses were stated as key factors influencing this trend. Furthermore, recommendations by friends and relatives living or having studied in America also influenced Taiwanese students’ choice of the US. Indonesian students were more attracted to choosing Australia over the US and received sufficient information about Australia’s education system. Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery (1997) found that Indonesian students who had a preference to study in the US rather than Australia cited family or friends residing in the US and the recognition of a US qualification as the major reasons for preferring that country. The authors concluded that access to sufficient information about a foreign study destination, and also recommendations from family or friends, were the most influential factors in these students’ choices of their host destinations. These findings are of particular relevance to my study as the influence of reference groups and access to information relevant in Europeans’ decisions to study in Australia will be explored.
Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) later enhanced their earlier research by conducting a series of studies over a four-year period in order to identify reasons why international students chose a particular study destination. The studies included a total of 2,485 international students from Taiwan, Indonesia, India and China who were participating in a number of educational programs in Australia. In addition to the abovementioned pull factors, several motivational push factors were identified which influenced these students to study abroad. For example, one important push factor for students who studied abroad was “a perception that an overseas course of study is better than a local one”. In addition, the students were also pushed to study overseas “to gain better understanding of the West” and “an intention to migrate after graduation” (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, p. 88).

It was outlined above that earlier studies found that a low level of socio-economic development in international students’ home countries was often a significant push factor for international students to study in a developed country. Mazzarol and Soutar’s (2002) study also highlighted financial issues in the context of the costs of studying abroad as a pull factor to select a certain host country rather than costs as a factor pushing students out of their home countries to study abroad. The author found that study fees, living expenses, and travel played an important role in students’ selection of Australia as their study destination. Other studies have also identified similar economic factors such as costs of study and cost of living to be an important influence on international students’ who choose Australia (Bourke 2000; Evaluation Solutions 2010; Moogan, Baron & Harris 1999).

It is evident that living and education expenses are an important influence on students’ decision-making in regard to foreign education as these costs vary across countries (AEI 2003; Beine, Noël & Ragot 2013; Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003; Coleman 2004; Lawley & Perry 1998; Smart & Ang 1992). A comparative study of costs for international students in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US also identified that prospective international students consider and compare living costs, study completion time and course fees when selecting their host countries and universities (Back, Davis & Olsen 1997).
However, it must be noted that the majority of the abovementioned research was undertaken when Australia was still at a cost advantage compared to other Western, English language-based education destinations. Since then, this cost advantage has been diminishing with the relentless increase in the value of the Australian dollar in recent years which just came to a halt in 2014. Thus, the international students included in these studies might not have stated the importance of reasonable costs of Australia’s education as an important factor for their selection of Australia after 2010. The full costs of international education, including study fees, living expenses, accommodation and travel expenses, have become much more expensive for international students studying in Australia (HSBC Group Australia 2013). And, as Figure 11 shows, Australia used to be a cheaper study destination than the US, the UK, and Canada, but was the world’s most expensive destination for international students in 2013.

![Comparison of full costs of international education in various study destinations](image)

**Figure 11:** Comparison of full costs of international education in various study destinations (in $US)
*Source: HSBC Group Australia, August 2013*

However, despite the rising costs, Australia has remained a popular destination for international students, particularly in the higher education sector. This indicates that students consider factors other than cost, such as quality of education and life, when choosing a host study destination. Furthermore, some studies found that the opportunity to finance some of their study costs with part-time work was an important factor in students’ decisions to study in Australia (Evaluation Solutions 2010; IDP Education 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Rodan 2009). The opportunity to work under certain conditions while studying abroad evidently increases the attractiveness of Australian international education, particularly for degree students.
and this might ‘offset’ the high study and living costs. The relevance of economic factors in European students’ decisions to select Australia as their study destination will be examined.

3.3.3 Stages of decision-making

The study of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) cited above was also one of the first studies to acknowledge that the decision-making processes of tertiary students when selecting a final study abroad destination involve at least three distinct stages – the decision to study abroad, the selection of a host country and the selection of a host institution. The first stage, also named the predisposition stage (Chen, L-H 2007), begins when the student decides to study internationally, either for an entire degree program or temporarily. In the second stage, students search for information about potential study destinations abroad, utilising all sources available to them. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) concluded that in the third stage, students will finally choose their host institution and program. The authors also argued that recommendations of friends and relatives, cost issues and a variety of educational pull factors such as reputation of the institution, range of courses, and quality of teaching and technological resources, will influence students in the different stages and will make a particular institution more attractive than its competitors.

While the research of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), and also other authors such as Chen and Zimitat (2006) and Jianvittayakit and Dimanche (2010) indicates that there is usually a rational sequential order to the way students decide first to study abroad in general, then select a host destination and finally a host institution and program, some studies did not find a sequential order to these stages. For example, Pimpa (2004) did not find any particular sequential order among Thai-students’ decision-making processes in opting to study abroad and argued that the choice of the academic program seemed the most important consideration to these students. According to Pimpa (2004), after students have gathered and analysed a large amount of information they often compare several opportunities and evaluate alternatives directly linked with their needs, preferences and time constraints, and
also consider affordability and cultural accessibility, before they make a final decision on their host country and institution.

A study by Lee (2013) based on the push-pull model investigated factors influencing the flow of international students to Taiwan. Compared to the research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) the study showed that not all pull factors were equally important in the study decisions of the participants. Lee prioritised various elements of the students’ decision-making processes into an analytical order called the Analytical Hierarchy Process to help educational practitioners focus on the most important issues. For example, ‘costs for a degree’ seemed to be the most important consideration whereas ‘recommendations from others’, particularly friends and educational agents, were the least important influences for students choosing Taiwan as a study abroad destination. However, Lee’s study focused predominantly on Asian students (around 80% of the sample) with the duration of study in Taiwan ranging from under a year to more than four years. The study did not clarify how many study participants studied in a degree or temporary study abroad program and therefore did not distinguish between these different student groups, making it difficult to know if there were similarities and differences between degree and temporary mobility students.

Chen’s Synthesis Model (Chen, L-H 2007, p. 777) also considers different influential factors and does not distinguish between the selection of a host country and institution in different stages. Chen’s model consists of three overlapping stages. Each stage is influenced by three domains of factors: 1) student characteristics including socio-cultural background, personal characteristics and preferences; 2) significant others including recommendations from reference groups (for example family, friends, and peer students); and 3) external push-pull factors including positive and negative influences from the home and host countries and institutions (Chen, L-H 2007). As can be seen in Figure 12 below the stages in Chen’s Modified Synthesis Model are: 1) a predisposition stage which includes the general decision to study abroad and is equal to Stage 1 described above; 2) a search/selection/application stage where students search for information on available alternatives before they make a decision and lodge one or more application;
and 3) a choice stage where students, after they receive offers of admission, consider alternatives before finally selecting a university and program.

**Figure 12:** The Modified Synthesis Model  
*Source: Adapted from (Chen, L-H 2007, p. 777)*

Drawing from Chen’s (2007) model, this research also acknowledges the different stages of decision-making and highlights that a wide variety of factors can influence each stage. I also assumed that the European students do not all necessarily follow stages in a sequential order in their decision-making processes. As further explained in the next section, the conceptual framework for this present study is adapted from Chen’s model shown in Figure 12. A key development in the proposed model is that the final decision stage is a separate, fourth stage of decision-making and that students are influenced in all four stages by various motivations, personal preferences and knowledge, and recommendations from reference groups and information they receive from media sources such as the internet.
3.3.4 The influence of reference groups and media sources

Students seek credible, reliable and comprehensive information which allows them to make informed decisions when selecting a study destination abroad. Different sources can influence students, not only in the initial stage of their general decision to pursue education abroad, but also in their subsequent selection of a host country, institution and program. The use and influence of information sources can vary across students from different cultural backgrounds and varies during the decision-making stages but can generally be grouped into:

1. Information received from reference groups:
   a) family (parents, siblings, spouse, etc.), friends and social networks (alumni-, peer students)
   b) internal academic advisers (at students’ home institution)
   c) external academic advisers (outside students’ home institution).

2. Information received from media sources:
   a) internet (e.g. blogs, private and commercial educational websites)
   b) other media sources (e.g. print media, TV, radio).

**Family, friends and social networks**

The importance of influences from students’ family, friends and/or social networks in promoting study abroad participation is widely acknowledged in the literature (Anderson 2007; Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010; Lawley 1994; Maringe & Carter 2007). Other studies have also confirmed that international students from different cultural backgrounds including Asian, American and European, made their decisions to study in Australia based on advice from family and friends (Abbott & Doucouliagos 2009; Michael, Armstrong & King 2003; Son & Pearce 2005; TNT Magazine 2004). The influence of family members (particularly parents) seems stronger if they have higher levels of education, proficiency in foreign languages, and/or substantial travel experience (Brooks & Waters 2011; Cairns & Smyth 2011; Salisbury, Paulsen &
Pascarella 2010). However, it should be mentioned here that negative study abroad experiences of friends, family or former study abroad students can influence students’ decisions as well (Van Mol & Timmerman 2013).

**Internal information sources received at students’ home institution**

Information about study abroad opportunities can be provided by academic advisers and educational (government) organisations in the student’s home country. European institutions generally encourage and facilitate international mobility among their students once they enter university by providing sufficient mobility information via different promotion channels (Teichler, Ferencz & Waechter 2011). Information is provided to a large extent via the university’s department for international education, commonly named the ‘international office’. The international department/office provides information through seminars and workshops, through the institution’s website but also via brochures, flyers, or noticeboards placed around the institution (Vossensteyn et al. 2010). In addition, information about study mobility opportunities can be also provided through the individual faculty and academic advisers of the students, for example through a professor who maintains close relation with a certain foreign university. Thus, most European students receive sufficient information about mobility programs in other European countries as well as outside of Europe, often from the beginning of their tertiary study (Teichler 2004b).

**External information sources received outside of students’ home institution**

Once students have a firm intention to study abroad they often utilise additional external sources in their search for specific information to select their host country and institution, including educational recruitment agencies, government organisations or HEIs from foreign countries which can either operate within the student’s home country or overseas. Government organisations involved in international education, such as The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Germany or the Department of Education and Learning in Australia, usually provide initial, generic information about study abroad opportunities to tertiary students.
For example, it is a high priority of the German government to foster student mobility. Together with other German organisations such as the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the DAAD, they aim to increase the mobility of all German tertiary students who spend part of their studies abroad from around 33% in 2013 to 50% by 2020 (DAAD 2015). The main sources of funding for German students are portable grants/loans, DAAD scholarships and scholarships awarded by Federal States and Foundations. The DAAD, a self-administered association of HEIs in Germany, provides information and financial support to over 120,000 highly qualified outgoing and foreign incoming students and academics. The DAAD’s contribution to encouraging (push) German students to study abroad is diverse and includes a broad range of funding programs. This has been highly successful. For example, outgoing student mobility of UK students is only 5% compared to around 30% of German tertiary students (OECD 2014).

In Australia, international student recruitment is a professional business undertaken by experienced educational agents who incorporate different recruitment practices from other industries such as call centres and customer relationship management (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012). Agencies are also a very important part of the marketing strategies of Australian tertiary institutions, as around half of commencing international tertiary students in Australia were recruited via agencies. Agents usually have a contractual agreement with Australian institutions and operate on a commission basis related to the tuition fees of the recruited student. For example, and as already outlined in Section 2.3.3, the independent, not-for-profit organisation IDP Education Australia is one of the world leaders in assisting international students to find an overseas study program and institution (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012). Several studies suggest that commercial agencies are an important source for international students to obtain information about Australian international education, and that they also influence their selection of a host institution (AEI 2003; Eduworld 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Pimpa 2004). This study will examine how influential agencies were in European students’ decision-making to temporarily study abroad and to select their host country and institution.
In addition, the Australian Government via its Department of Education and Training provides general advice to students intending to study in Australia through their website, brochures and information centres (AEI 2013). The department works closely with the higher education sector, and other government agencies and ministries to promote inbound and outbound student mobility.

Furthermore, the presence of agencies and academic advisers from foreign universities at designated educational information events or exhibitions, and also campus visits in students’ home countries, are an important source for students to obtain information about study opportunities in other countries (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012). Research has confirmed that education exhibitions constitute an important information source for students seeking education in Australia and often provide the initial contact with prospective students and their families (AEI 2003; Harris 2002). For example, the annual international exhibition for higher and continuing education, ‘Studyworld’ in Berlin, offers an opportunity to gather first-hand information on higher education programs worldwide as over 170 exhibitors from over 25 countries including Australia are present (ICWE 2015). In addition, Australian universities have strong international marketing and student recruitment strategies in place to attract more students (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012). Among other tools, Australian universities communicate marketing messages via website and social media sites, attend overseas student recruitment fairs and universities, and provide scholarship programs for outstanding international students. Overall, information and support provided by external sources including government organisations can be a significant push factor for students to participate in student mobility programs.

Maringe and Carter (2007) explored key influences from reference groups and incorporated these into their conceptual framework of push-pull factors influencing the decision-making of 28 African degree students studying in the UK. While the use of interviews at two UK universities as a single data method may not permit wide generalisation of findings, the study provides a useful hypothesis to stimulate further research in this area. As can be seen in Figure 13 below the authors’ model of push-pull factors suggests that there are six elements that shaped the decision-making of
African students in opting to study in the UK with the arrows in between the boxes indicating the dynamic reflexive processes that occur as the students assess information from several sources. Students weigh up and assess this information, but also discard some of the information. The push and pull elements are: political, economic and academic push factors such as escaping political crisis or poverty; pull factors in the host country such as high quality and recognition of the degree program, a safe environment and an easy application process; and institutional pull factors such as availability of courses and research, work opportunities and accommodation.

Figure 13: A model for African students’ overseas study decision-making
Source: Maringe & Carter 2007, p. 471
On the other hand, the push and pull factors are filtered through the moderating influence of perceptions of risks and anxieties such as financial and socio-cultural risks associated with making the decision to study abroad. Maringe and Carter (2007) also added the post-purchase experience of the study experience into the model as all of the interviewees had already studied in the UK.

It was highlighted by Maringe and Carter (2007) and is shown in Figure 13 above, that recommendations and information provided by reference groups (friends and family), internal advisers (school staff) and external advisers (agencies) were influential in African students’ decision-making and acted for some students as a push factor to study in the UK and for others as a pull factor to select a certain university in the UK. The authors found that the students who were already in the UK were more influenced by recommendations of friends who were already studying at certain UK institutions when selecting their host institution, whereas students intending to study in the UK were more influenced by educational agencies operating in their home countries such as the British Council or embassies. This finding highlights that students from similar cultural backgrounds can be influenced by different reference groups when selecting their host institutions depending on their personal circumstances and access to certain reference groups.

Maringe and Carter’s (2007) model influences the conceptual framework for this study although their model is limited in that it focuses on degree students from developing countries. For the purposes of this current research, I have extended and adapted Maringe and Carter’s (2007) model to develop a model which captures the decision-making processes of temporary study abroad students from developed countries. This model will be explained in Section 3.5.

Information from media sources
Websites and social technologies (software and/or applications that are used for social communication purposes) have become powerful dynamic educational information tools for tertiary students searching for mobility opportunities. Information received from online social networking tools such as blogs, Wikis, Podcasting or social networking sites make a noticeable impact on students’
decisions about whether and where to study abroad (Hamid, Chang & Kurnia 2009). The use of social media, particularly from private blogs and Facebook sites, has grown exponentially in all facets of the higher education sector, providing first-hand information and support from a peer perspective rather than a marketing perspective (Woodley & Meredith 2012). Other media sources such as print media (e.g. magazines, flyers, university guides) and broadcast media (TV, radio) are becoming less important as all information is available on websites. In particular, the proportion of students from Western countries making use of these older style information sources is remarkably low (Muche & Waechter 2005).

Maringe and Carter (2007) also found that league tables and course profiles accessed through the internet were a key influence on African students’ decision-making processes when selecting the UK as their host country and also when selecting their host institutions in the UK.

Overall, past research indicates that easily accessible information via web-based channels (e.g. university websites, social media websites, blogs, alumni) and also authentic personal information sources (family, friends or academic advisers) were more frequently accessed and were more influential in students’ decisions than sources of non-personal information via print and broadcast media (Muche & Waechter 2005). This present study will investigate if this is also the case for European students who study temporarily in Australia.

3.3.5 Pull factors affecting choice of study abroad destination

3.3.5.1 Educational and socio-cultural factors

De Wit (2008) was one of the first to acknowledge the influence of educational and socio-cultural factors in students’ home and host countries on their decision-making. De Wit’s (2008) study looks predominantly at economic and political factors influencing international degree students, as has been done by other researchers.
However, his study took a different perspective on why students are motivated to undertake degree mobility and also incorporating into its framework the influence of specific educational pull factors such as reputation, diversity and compatibility of a higher education system and socio-cultural factors such as language factors and lifestyle in the host country. While earlier studies provided the foundations for his critical analysis of international students’ flows, De Wit’s (2008) study investigated which factors were most dominant, which have disappeared, and which are new compared to findings from previous studies. He aimed to address the critique that most of these studies analysed the flow between the main sending and main receiving countries with a focus on student flows from developing to developed countries and flows between developed countries. De Wit (2008) provided an extensive framework of the push and pull factors that he believed determined international students’ circulation by country or region and in a comparative perspective. Table 4 below summarises De Wit’s (2008) framework which made a distinction between various push and pull rationales for student mobility in three categories: educational factors; political/social-cultural factors and economic factors. De Wit’s framework implies that some of the same factors can both push students to study abroad and pull them to a specific destination. For example, academic freedom not existing in students’ home country pushes the student to study overseas in a country which provides academic freedom.

De Wit’s (2008) framework suggests that before students make a final decision on their study location, they select several criteria to assess a country and city as potential study destinations. Students generally search for information associated with the quality and affordability of life, and also investigate safety and socio-cultural issues. In addition, other factors which often influence students’ choices of a host country are how the tertiary educational system works, how easy it is to obtain a study visa and what opportunities a potential host destination offers to work while studying there and also post-study abroad.
Table 4: Push and pull factors for outward student mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Push Factors</th>
<th>Pull Factors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Factors</td>
<td>Educational Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced value of national versus foreign degree</td>
<td>Enhanced value of national degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic human resource capacity</td>
<td>Absorptive capacity of higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectiveness of domestic higher education</td>
<td>Existing stock of national students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of distance education</td>
<td>Strategic alliances with home partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing presence of private and foreign providers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic alliances with foreign partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability, ranking, status of higher education</td>
<td>System compatibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with international mobility</td>
<td>Cost of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/Social/Cultural Factors</td>
<td>Opportunities, diversity, ranking, status of higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional unity</td>
<td>Active recruitment policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emigration policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial ties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information isolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political instability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic alliances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic isolation</td>
<td>Language factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural disposition</td>
<td>Cultural ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependance on world economy</td>
<td>Lure of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human development index factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities on return</td>
<td>Import/export levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical distance</td>
<td>Human development index factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: (De Wit 2008, p. 28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The grey shading presents factors that influenced the framework of this present study.

Some of the factors outlined in Table 4 above influenced the framework of my study and they are marked in grey in the table. However, most of the push-pull factors in De Wit’s framework are not applicable to factors influencing students from developed countries to temporarily study abroad in another developed country. For example, most of the push factors in De Wit’s framework relate to factors that pushed students from developing countries to undertake degree mobility programs in a developed country, which was not the case in this current study. These factors
imply a shortage of educational opportunities in the student’s home country and also point to economic and political advantages in the host countries. For example, economic factors such as the human resource development levels and political factors such as academic freedom or immigration policies are not likely to be so relevant to European students’ decisions to study abroad temporarily in another developed country. Furthermore, De Wit’s framework does not clarify which push and pull factors are most or least prominent in the different stages of students’ decision-making processes. The framework also does not take into consideration whether the recommendations of reference groups and other information sources influence students’ destination choices. De Wit’s framework also does not address the role that a country’s image may play in influencing students’ selection of a host destination.

Based on the results of studies which are outlined in detail in the next section I suggest that the image of a potential destination can have an important influence on a student’s decision-making when finally selecting which country to study abroad in. Therefore, country image is incorporated as a possible decision-making factor in my framework. To date, few other studies utilising the push-pull theory in their conceptual framework have examined country image factors. Country image factors and their influence on decision-making in the study abroad context are discussed in further detail next.

3.3.5.2 Image of study destination

Besides recommendations and information prospective international students may receive from reference groups and the internet about a foreign country, several studies suggest that there is a direct and positive relationship between students’ purchase intentions of education abroad and their perceived image of a destination (Bourke 2000; Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino 2006; Glover 2011b; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor 2005; Sirakaya, Sonmez & Choi 2001; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth 2002). The attitudes of consumers, such as international students, towards a certain (educational) product or service are
related to the stereotypes and cognitive beliefs about national quality standards, and the picture that these consumers attach to a product’s country of origin (Srikatanyoo & Gnoth 2002). Furthermore, country or city images are composed of many, often tourism-related, aspects such as demographics, culture, familiarity and visual attributes of a destination (Sirakaya, Sonmez & Choi 2001). Some of the dimensions and attributes suggested by Beerli and Martin (2004) that determine the perceived tourist destination image may also become crucial in students’ selections of host destinations, including ‘political and economic factors’, ‘natural, and social environment’ and ‘tourism leisure and recreation’.

Although most research about country image relates to products, some studies have revealed that that the relationship between country image and a service seem to be similar to the one between country image and product (Javalgi, Cutler & Winans 2001). International higher education is understood as a professional service which is characterised by a higher degree of personal contact, complexity, divergence and customisation than other service businesses (Patterson, Romm & Hill 1998). An image of a country or city is not necessarily objectively true, but prospective international students may evaluate the quality of international education by using destination images because of the difficulties of pre-purchase evaluation (Srikatanyoo & Gnoth 2002).

Students often prefer to receive qualifications offered in countries that have a prestigious image of high quality as they tend to believe that this will enhance their future job and salary prospects (Van Bouwel & Veugelers 2009). Similarly, other studies have suggested that a country’s reputation for high quality in higher education, and international recognition of qualification perceived from an foreign institution, along with an excellent teaching and learning environment, positively influence students’ selection of their study destination (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003; González, Mesanza & Mariel 2011; Lawley 1998; Maringe & Carter 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Mpinganjira 2009; Soo & Elliott 2010; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth 2005). However, although the quality of education and the high rankings of institutions appear to be important in attracting international students, there are other key academically related factors that influence students’ choices of study destinations.
These include easy access to reliable information about the country’s educational system and easy entry and application procedures for international students to tertiary institutions (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003; HEFCE 2004; Maringe & Carter 2007).

In understanding why international students choose Australia as their educational destination, it is important to examine perceptions and images, in particular those associated with studying, living and travelling in Australia. In general Australian universities have an excellent reputation, and a number of them are in the ‘top university ranking lists’ and this attracts students from all around the world (QS World University 2014). Additionally, Australia has often been perceived as having an advantage compared to other English language-based education destinations such as the US or the UK in terms of lifestyle, natural and safe living environment and climate (Lawley & Perry 1998). For example, a study found that international students studying in tourism programs in Australia placed great importance on the natural geographic attributes of a potential study abroad destination when selecting their study destination (Ruhanen & McLennan 2010).

Thus, it has to be acknowledged that a country’s image might influence international students’ destination choice, although the relative importance of image attributes probably differs between individuals. While some prospective international students place their emphasis only on the educational reputation (image) of a country and the status attached to study outcomes, the majority acquire comprehensive information related to study, and living and travelling in their potential host country (Bourke 2000). Therefore, before students make a final decision on their study location, they use several criteria in addition to image factors to assess a country and city as a potential study destination (Cubillo et al. 2005). These criteria will be explained in the next sections.

3.3.5.3 Country characteristics of a study abroad destination

Students search for general information about location factors, the quality and affordability of life and also safety and socio-cultural issues in a potential host country. In addition, other factors which often influence students’ choices of a host
country are how the tertiary educational system works, how easy it is to obtain a study visa, what opportunities a potential host destination offers to work while studying there, and opportunities for cultural, tourist, and travel activities (Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino 2006).

Location factors include attributes such as the physical climate, the landscape and geographic proximity to students’ home country. These factors can pull international students to a certain host country (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). A study of Chinese students in Australia found that while educational programs and reputation were important in their decision, the natural scenery, and the climate and the perceived safe lifestyle had a higher impact on their destination choice (Wang & Davidson 2008). Attributes associated with Australia’s pleasant climate, sunny beaches, clean environment, diverse scenery, natural attractions and fascinating native animals and plants were ranked highest in Chinese students’ pre- and post-arrival perceptions of Australia. The authors of the study suggested that the pleasant climate and environment should be viewed as one of the major competitive advantages of Australia and therefore should be highlighted more to potential international students.

Another factor of concern for prospective international students that is in their country selection is the geographical distance to their home country in two contrasting ways: Students might be attracted by the geographical proximity of their home and host countries or in some cases, a large distance may be an attraction. Several studies of international students in Australia have found that studying in a country which was relatively close to home was a reason for Asian students, among others, to choose Australia as a study destination (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor 2005). This has also been supported by a study by Kim, J (1998) who argued that a large distance between host and home countries is likely to have a negative impact on students’ host country choice because of the travel costs involved. Another study found that the geographic proximity of the host country to Australia did not influence Australian students’ destination choices to participate in an exchange program. It appeared that these Australian students placed greater value on cultural similarity than on geographic proximity when selecting a host.
country (Daly 2002). Not many studies could be found which investigated whether a
great distance between home and host country was perceived as an attractive
attribute influencing international students to select countries such as Australia and
New Zealand because they are far away from home.

3.3.5.4 Choice of host institution

Perceptions of a country’s image combined with knowledge of certain destination
attributes affect students’ final selection of a host destination. As discussed
previously, rankings and reputation are the most visible indications for prospective
international students of a country’s quality in higher education. However, before
international students finally select the host country they usually also consider at
which institution to study abroad. This process is characterised by a critical evaluation
of characteristics of the higher education institutions. These characteristics include
academic reputation (prestige) and ranking and quality of teaching of the overseas
institutions. For example, an institution’s reputation for academic quality and high
quality staff were among the most important factors when international students
considered their choice of a host institution in Australia (Chen, C-H & Zimitat 2006;
Evaluation Solutions 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Shanka, Quintal & Taylor 2005,
Krishnan, 2009), in Malaysia (Barron, Baum & Conway 2009; Dahari & Abduh 2011)
and in the UK (Moogan, Baron & Harris 1999; Soo & Elliott 2010).

However, while the ranking and reputation of a specific host institution might be
important, other institutional attributes such as tuition fees, the availability of
scholarships, and recognition of qualification in the home country have been
identified by different studies as also being influential factors in international
students’ selection of host institutions (Baharun, Awang & Padlee 2011; Dahari &
Abduh 2011; Phang 2013). Together with other factors, for example the
advertising/marketing activities of an institution, these attributes create an
institutional image which can strongly influence the student’s selection of a host
institution (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). The choice of
institution might also depend on the technology, learning, sport and social facilities
on campus as well as the service and support systems provided for international students (Lee, C-F 2013). Furthermore, if students have family, friends or peers who have studied at a certain foreign institution, their experiences and recommendations are often also influential in students’ selection of a host institution (Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010; Lawley & Perry 1998; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). Several studies also confirm the importance of course characteristics, including aspects of course standards and content, as well as recognition of a program and course by employers (Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010; Lawley & Perry 1998).

**University/campus environment and facilities**

Several studies have found that the university environment, including learning, technology and social facilities, are important elements of prospective students’ decision-making processes when selecting a tertiary institution overseas (Barron, Baum & Conway 2009; Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino 2006). Campus location and atmosphere, easy access to public transport and accommodation near campus are all considered important by students (Arambewela, Hall & Zuhair 2005; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). Further, an ‘established population of overseas students’ at an institution implies a multi-cultural campus environment and that university staff are more experienced with international students which can also be an influential factor for some students in selecting a particular Australian institution (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002).

**Administration factors**

The ease of entry to overseas universities and helpful application support have not been identified by existing studies as playing a very important part in students’ selection of an overseas institution. However, students may have a number of institutions shortlisted and their final decision might be influenced by a professional, quick and helpful response to their enquiries and application (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). Therefore, if students are undecided, administration factors might become more important in the final selection of a host institution.

Service and support offered to international students, such as help with finding accommodation and social activities might play an additional important part in
students’ decisions. A study found that ‘service provided by the university’ including an extensive orientation program for incoming exchange students, has been considered highly important by exchange students in the selection of an Australian host institution (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). It was revealed that services such as the organisation of accommodation were important elements in student satisfaction.

It needs to be clarified that for students who want to participate in an exchange program the situation is different. Their choice of institution is constrained because a) only overseas universities that have exchange partnerships with their home university can be selected and b) exchange places are often limited, particularly at popular destinations. Therefore, an existing partnership between home and host universities which ensures a recognition of credits and an available exchange spot is often the most important institution selection criterion for exchange students (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; Van Hoof & Verbeeten 2005).

Thus far, studies have tended to focus on students from developing countries and on the push-pull factors influencing degree mobile students when selecting their study destination abroad. Only a small number of studies that utilise the push-pull theory have looked beyond academic, economic and socio-cultural factors and also considered the influence of travel and tourism-related push and pull factors. The next two sections focus on students from developed countries who are considering to, or have already participated in, temporary mobility programs. Students’ motivations to study abroad are explained with a focus on travel-related factors which can pull these students to study abroad in a certain country. Barriers to students studying abroad are not included in the literature review as they are not the subject of this study. However, barriers that the students may have experienced during their decision-making processes are discussed in light of my own findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.3.6 Push-pull factors according to the form of mobility

It is agreed among many researchers, academics and students that the benefits of a study period abroad are multiple, encompassing personal, social, status,
professional, academic, and language development aspects (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003; Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino 2006; Franklin 2010; King, R, Findlay & Ahrens 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Mpinganjira 2009; Sutton & Rubin 2004). However, the literature review reveals that students’ motivations to study abroad differ substantially depending on the type of mobility program (degree or temporary mobility) and on the cultural backgrounds of the students.

Although the terms reasons, benefits and motivation have slightly different meanings the terms are often used interchangeably. Therefore, while I considered literature on all three terms I distinguish in my study between these terms. In my view students are generally motivated by the perceived benefits of studying abroad. This pushes them into the decision to study abroad in general in the first stage of the decision-making processes. Reasons are more related to the factors which influence a student’s selection of a certain host country and institution.

Studies of international students from European countries have found that most students are motivated to achieve personal, social, and language development while temporarily studying abroad (Findlay et al. 2006; HEFCE 2004; Krzaklewska & Krupnik 2006; Van Mol & Timmerman 2013; Vossensteyn et al. 2010). Further, the exposure to different social and cultural environments which present an opportunity to have an alternative view of the world is identified as one of the most common benefits for students from developed countries, particularly for students participating in temporary mobility programs.

Similar results regarding the motivations and benefits of student mobility were found among students coming from countries other than European Western countries. For example, a study of Australian students found that they were motivated to study abroad by the likelihood of improving future employment opportunities and a general desire to travel, live overseas and experience another culture (Daly 2002). These findings have also been supported by a study in which prospective exchange students from New Zealand identified the exposure to different cultures and languages, followed by career enhancement and opportunities to live and work overseas, as the main benefits of studying abroad (Doyle et al. 2010). While the desire
to learn or enhance competency in another language (often English) is usually a significant motivational factor for European students to go abroad, it has been found that the knowledge of the language spoken in the host country will greatly influence whether students decide to travel to that country (Daly & Barker 2005). For example, New Zealand students preferred to go to traditional English-speaking destinations such as the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia for their exchange programs which is consistent with the fact that most university students from English-speaking countries are monolingual (Doyle et al. 2010). Another study of students coming mainly from the US and Europe found that the most important motivation to participate in an exchange program in Australia was, for almost all participants, the ‘desire to travel’ in Australia (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008).

Muntasira, Jiang and Tien (2009) explored push and pull factors which motivated students to participate in an exchange program at the Jönköping International Business School in Sweden by utilising the push-pull model from Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) discussed above. The authors collected data from two focus groups, one with students from Europe and one with students coming from North and South America. However, it should be noted that the study did not indicate how many students were in the focus groups. The study also interviewed six students from the Business School who were going on an exchange program in the next semester as part of their home curriculum. The study found that the promotion and encouragement by the students’ home university was the initial push factor for them to study abroad. Further, the students saw an exchange program as an opportunity to enhance their personal development through intercultural communication, to practise language skills and to travel. The students were influenced by recommendations from former exchange students and also considered pull factors such as the geographic location, weather, culture, living costs and educational factors when selecting their host destinations. However, although most pull factors were similar, there were some differences between participants from the focus group and the interviewees regarding language, cultural and geographical preferences. For example, while the Swedish students were interested in Asian cultures and the warm weather in their host countries, the international students from the focus groups often wanted to experience the cold
weather in Sweden. The authors also compared their results with findings from a previous study of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and found similarities and differences between degree and exchange students. In general, the study found that push factors for exchange students are different to those of degree students as international communication, practising language skills and travelling were not stated as the most important push factors by degree students. However, pull factors were the same for degree and exchange students except that the language used for teaching and communication was a more important factor for the exchange students. Muntasira, Jiang and Tien (2009) study confirmed distinctive push and pull factors which can be applied to students studying in a temporary (exchange) program abroad. For example, they found that students are more likely to be pushed to study abroad if their home university promotes study abroad programs. The authors also found that travel-related factors push students to participate in exchange programs.

Another study on students studying abroad temporarily was undertaken by Eder, Smith and Pitts (2010). The study took a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews collected via online chats to identify factors affecting why and how international students chose their final temporary study abroad destination, in this case the US. The authors found that the desire for personal growth, for improved English skills and improved career opportunities were the most important push factors, whereas institutional issues such as course offer, a high educational level, physical features such as a comfortable climate and attractiveness of the city, and the US culture were pull factors for the student to select their host destination. However, the study included only 21 undergraduate students who temporarily studied at one mid-sized Southern university. This study also used in-depth interviews to identify factors influencing student’s decision-making processes when selecting a study abroad destination and it focused on personal and professional motivational factors such as personal growth, improving English language skills and career opportunities. The present study extends the findings of Eder, Smith and Pitts (2010) in that it also focuses on travel-related push and pull factors and includes 29 interview and 194 survey participants studying at 26 Australian tertiary institutions. The findings of this
study, and studies of temporary international students discussed above will be compared and contrasted in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis.

In contrast, and as outlined already above, several studies among international degree students coming from Asian countries found that the most important motivations to study in a developed country were students’ desires to understand a Western culture, to obtain a better education abroad than that offered in their home countries, and also migration (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Min, Khoon & Tan 2012).

However, besides the different motivations there are similarities between all students deciding to participate in temporary or degree mobility programs. The majority of tertiary students believe that they will gain qualifications while studying abroad which will enable them to cope more successfully with the increasing international dimension later at work and therefore have better career prospects (HEFCE 2004; Hercog & Van de Laar 2013; Holdaway, Bryan & Allan 1988; Min, Khoon & Tan 2012; Mpinganjira 2009; Teichler 2011).

3.3.7 Travel-related factors as a motivation to study abroad

As discussed in Chapter 2, research on factors influencing international students’ destination choices has often focused on issues related to academic attributes such as institutional reputation, recognised quality of programs, and the benefits and costs of international education. However, tourism-related perceptions such as the availability of attractive tourism and travel offers may also play an important part in students’ decisions and pull them to a study destination (Glover 2011b; Wang & Davidson 2008). Further, it was also explained in detail in Section 2.4 that a number of studies have identified that the travel-related perceptions of Australia had a major role in international students’ selection of Australia (Davidson et al. 2010; Forsey & Low 2013; Glover 2011b; Michael, Armstrong & King 2003; Wang & Davidson 2008) or another country as their study destination (Abbott & Ali 2010; Huang 2008; Jianvittayakit & Dimanche 2010; Ryan, C & Zhang 2007). Other studies have also found that the desire to travel was a strong motivator for international students who selected Australia for their exchange programs (Freestone, 2008; Llewellyn-Smith,
2008) but also for European students participating in exchange program abroad (Teichler 2004b; Van Hoof & Verbeeten 2005).

For example, Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe (2008) and Jianvittayakit (2010) found that students wanted to combine travel and studying in a foreign country and therefore were influenced by a variety of educational and travel-related push and pull factors. The findings of both studies were outlined in Section 2.4.4. Notably, both studies found that the desire to travel was ranked as the most influential factor in encouraging students to temporarily study abroad, and both highlighted the importance of travel-related push and pull factors in influencing the choice of host destination for students to temporarily study abroad. These studies, therefore, are particularly relevant to my research which also focuses on temporary study abroad students and travel-related push and pull factors. Consequently, these findings were informed the conceptual framework for this study which also examines how influential travel-related factors are in European students’ decisions to study in Australia.

Furthermore, other personal but travel-related factors can also motivate students to study abroad. For example, some studies found that students who lived and travelled prior to their tertiary education (for instance participated in a school exchange or gap-year) were also more likely to engage in mobility programs during their university studies (HEFCE 2004; Van Mol & Timmerman 2013). If prior independent travel experiences, alone or with friends, were positive, this seems to have had a positive influence on the desire to study abroad. In addition, students who have a general desire to travel and to experience new things are also more likely to participate in study mobility programs (Li, Olson & Frieze 2013).

3.3.8 Applying the push-pull theory in this study

In summary, the push-pull theory has been continually employed by scholars to analyse and predict the internal and external factors influencing international degree students’ decisions to choose a study destination (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). More recently, studies based on push-pull factors have also been undertaken to investigate
the destination choices of temporary study abroad students. These studies have revealed different dimensions and aspects of push-pull factors for students participating in temporary student mobility compared to degree mobility. The use of the push-pull theory in this study provides more evidence about which push and pull factors are similar and which are different among students when studying abroad in degree and temporary mobility programs.

Regardless of its longevity and popularity, the traditional push-pull theory is generally considered to be a theory for capturing migration patterns and it has been criticised for ignoring individual characteristics that may account for the flow of people globally (either the flow of migrants or international students) (Peyton 2005). Furthermore, while the push-pull theory/model serves to systematically arrange all possible factors which influence students’ choices of a study destination abroad in a list of push and pull factors, it is rather descriptive and often does not include the socio-cognitive factors which influence students’ decisions (González, Mesanza & Mariel 2011). Another confusion is that the distinction between push and pull factors is sometimes not clear and the terms are used differently in various studies. For example, climate or weather can push students out of their home country while at the same time pull them to a certain destination.

Despite the acknowledged criticism, the push-pull theory is of value to this study. It helps to make a clear distinction between the intrinsic desire of students to travel abroad and other factors relevant in European students’ home countries that pushes them to study abroad, and the pull factors which determine how and why these students are attracted by a particular location, in this case Australia. In order to overcome these criticisms of the push-pull theory, it is not used as a single theoretical approach in the current study. Rather, it is complemented with the CDM theory which acknowledges decision-making as a cognitive process which presupposes the intelligence of the decision-maker and results in the selection of one course of action from among alternative scenarios (Gadomski 2006). Therefore, my conceptual framework overcomes the criticism that the push-pull theory of destination choice does not account for the individual characteristics of the students. Furthermore, in the conceptual framework of this study a distinction is made between the push and
pull factors in the different stages of students’ decision-making. This is done in order to discover which push and pull factors are more significant than other during the decision-making processes of international students. By taking this approach, this study addresses the criticism that the same push and pull factors existing in the entire decision-making process. In doing so, this study provides a unique and original understanding of European students’ decision-making processes about temporarily studying abroad.

It has been discussed that there are many push-pull factors that can influence student’s decision-making processes when selecting a study abroad destination. The push-pull theory of destination choice offers an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining the factors that influence international students’ decision-making. However, the push-pull theory does not incorporate the individual characteristics of international students that may account for their decision-making when selecting their study destination. CDM theory when used in combination with push-pull theory in the conceptual framework for this study, provides a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of students’ decision-making.

**Table 5** below demonstrates the most influential push-pull factors as identified by the literature to date and highlights the push-pull factors that are addressed in this study.
Table 5: Push-pull factors identified in the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Factors researched</th>
<th>Degree mobility</th>
<th>Temporary mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mazzarol et al (1997)</td>
<td>Recommendations ref. groups</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar (2002)</td>
<td>Access to information sources</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muche &amp; Waechter (2005)</td>
<td>Intrinsic motivations</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen (2007)</td>
<td>Extrinsic motivations</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee (2013)</td>
<td>Support of Study Abroad</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly (2002)</td>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krzaklewska &amp; Krupnik (2005)</td>
<td>Costs of living</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llewellyn-Smith &amp; McCabe (2008)</td>
<td>Cultural &amp; social experience</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muntasari et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Geographic location</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eder (2010)</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vossenstern et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Environment / landscape</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chew &amp; Croy (2011)</td>
<td>Easy to apply for a visa</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current study</td>
<td>Migration opportunities</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IS = ✓ = Factors were researched in the study. ✓ = Factors were identified as important by the research participants in the study.

Students home country: AUS=Australia; CAN=Canada; Dev. C.=Developed countries; EU=Europe; Various=from developed & developing countries

The next section outlines CDM theory and justifies its use in this research.
3.4 Cognitive decision-making theory

The foundation of many decision-making theories comes from a classic decision-making theory embedded in John Dewey’s (1859–1952) formulation of problem solving. The pragmatic design of classic decision-making theory can be defined as an optimising strategy which when fully performed combines all desired inputs and information (Tarter & Hoy 1998). The problem solving process involves recognising and evaluating the situation (recognition of need), identifying and assessing the alternatives (search, pre-purchase activities), making a decision and acting upon it (evaluation and purchase), and finally reviewing the decision (post-purchase evaluation). Decision-making theories are similar to consumer behaviour theories which analyse the behaviour behind the purchase of a certain product in order to devise potential marketing strategies (Kotler & Fox 1995). There are numerous decision-making theories which range from quantitative models of probability to qualitative forms which focus on the decision-maker.

The CDM theory is one of the few decision-making theories which emphasises human cognition and follows a socio-cognitive approach that captures the socio-cognitive processes involved in sense making during knowledge transfer (Gadomski 2006). As outlined above, the theory views “decision-making as a human mental process” (a cognitive process) which presupposes the intelligence of the decision-maker and results in the selection of one course of action from among various alternative scenarios and produces a final choice. According to Gadomski (2006, np) “the cognitive decision-making process begins when a choice is desired and no defined solution exists”. In order to make a decision, the individual (or the group) employs three sources: information, preferences, and knowledge. Information is either what the individual has learnt, or facts which are provided from outside the individual’s existing knowledge. Preferences are what the individual feels. Knowledge is what the individual knows. However, the decision-making process remains a reasoning or emotional process which can be rational or sometimes irrational.

CDM theory falls under the umbrella of consumer decision-making theories and is commonly used to explain the decision-making processes of students when choosing
education at home or abroad (Schiffman et al. 2013). Earlier studies analysing the cognitive decision-making processes of international students were often limited in their approaches. These studies distinguished between students’ choices of their host countries and students’ choices of host institutions, although the two decisions are interrelated and include similar criteria for the search and evaluation of information to make a final choice. Later studies introduced two-stage decision models (Bettman 1979; Gensch 1987). In two-stage models, students first search and view all available alternatives to study abroad, and later analyse the remaining opportunities.

CDM theory has been criticised for its assumption that all decision-making is rational and based on careful, sequential information processing (Maringe & Carter 2007). As highlighted by Moogan (1999) students might not always have the time and the patience to consider a range of information carefully and to remain objective when making their decisions about where and what to study abroad. I considered the fact that the risks involved in choosing a temporary study abroad program are lower than the risks involved in choosing a degree program. However, I was interested in examining the rational and irrational aspects of European students’ decision-making processes, and the results are further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Similar to Shocker et al. (1991) this study also acknowledges that there are more than two stages to students’ decision-making processes when making decisions about studying abroad, as has been identified in existing studies utilising the push-pull theory. This is reflected in the conceptual framework presented at the end of this chapter, and also presented in the data collection phases which gathered information on European students before and after their study abroad semester in Australia. This framework takes account of the different stages and times when students made their decisions.

The CDM theory complements the intention of this research to focus on the individual context of the decision-making processes of European international students. Given the high economic, academic and social uncertainties and risks involved in selecting an overseas study destination, many authors argue that students become involved in a process of complex and rational decision-making (Maringe & Carter 2007), making the CDM theory an appropriate complementary theory to the push-pull theory. To date, few studies on international students have utilised CDM
theory. One example is Bohman’s (2009) qualitative study that focused on understanding the decision-making factors that influenced 13 international students to participate in a four-year degree at community colleges in Illinois, US. Bohman (2009) utilised a multi-theoretical framework incorporating world culture theory, push-pull theory, and CDM theory. The international students mostly relied on information provided by personal sources such as family and friends, and educational agencies. Cost and location were the most important factors in their decisions to attend a community college. However, it was emphasised earlier in this current study that there are significant differences between degree and temporary study abroad students; thus, the findings of Bohman’s study have limited relevance to this study. This current study, therefore, further tests the utility of CDM theory in the context of international students and contributes to developing the body of research on this topic.

3.4.1 Bringing together the push-pull and CDM theories

The previous section outlined several interesting empirical studies which investigated international students’ decision-making processes when selecting a study destination. However, as discussed above, most of these studies have only considered single aspects of students’ decision-making such as why they select a certain educational program or how they choose a certain host country or institution.

In reviewing the literature, it is evident that a more holistic conceptual framework is needed. This framework needs to incorporate the different stages from when students first consider studying abroad, and then start to search, review and evaluate their knowledge and information about study abroad opportunities, through to the stage when they reach a final decision about where do study abroad. The push-pull and CDM theories were selected because together they provide a more holistic foundation for the theoretical framework used to explore European students’ decision-making processes. The two theories are well-equipped for the complexity of this research and when used in conjunction they address limitations that each has when used on its own. They promote a more complete understanding of the decision-
making process as they not only incorporate the different stages of decision-making, but also examine which motivational factors and informational sources have influenced the students. In addition, the push-pull theory can be applied to capture European students’ travel motivations and behaviours during their stay in Australia.

3.5 Conceptual framework

It was discussed in the previous sections that existing studies have often mixed international students from different cultural backgrounds in the same study, and sometimes did not distinguish between degree and temporary student mobility in their research. These inconsistencies in past research into the factors that influence students’ decisions suggest limitations within the research context of tertiary students who decide to study abroad (Salisbury et al. 2009). In response, the conceptual framework underpinning this study draws together applicable elements of the literature and relates them to the decision-making processes of students from Western European countries when selecting their temporary study abroad destination.

Figure 14 below is a visual representation of the conceptual framework for this current study which builds on the review of research in the field and the push-pull and CDM theories as discussed above. The framework also extended and adapted the model presented by Maringe and Carter (2007), and the model by L-H Chen (2007). These two models were explained in Section 3.3. This conceptual framework informs the foundations for the research presented in this thesis in order to better understand European students’ decisions to temporarily study in Australia. To address research objective one of this study, the motivations, rationales and influences in the different stages of the decision-making processes will be captured. The conceptual framework also includes the tourism- and travel-related factors that may influence students in their decisions to study in Australia. This is done in order to examine the relationships between international education and tourism (research objective two).
The conceptual framework has four segments/stages that students pass through during the decision-making processes they undergo to select a study abroad destination and host institution. The first stage, in which students make the general decision to study abroad, is the prerequisite for all following subsequent stages which then do not have to be undertaken in a sequential order. All four stages can be influenced by several aspects such as motivational factors, recommendations of resource groups, and various information sources about a study destination:

- **Predisposition stage:** This stage is the first stage of the students’ decision-making where they decide to study abroad. This stage can be influenced by a variety of facilitating and push factors including academic factors in the student's home country and tertiary institution; and motivational factors such as individual preferences related to the student’s desire to engage in student mobility, – for example the student may have a general desire to travel and experience new cultures. Other motivations can relate to personal and professional perceived benefits the student considers they would achieve when studying abroad, for example enhancing language and academic skills which offers them better future work opportunities.

- **Destination stage:** In this stage students search for information about potential study destinations abroad utilising all sources available. In this stage the student might be influenced by image factors, but she or he usually considers several country factors and searches for information that can pull them to favour and finally select a certain country where they temporarily want to study abroad. At the end of this stage the European student has decided to study abroad specifically in Australia.

- **Institutional stage:** In this stage the student searches for information about potential host institution(s) in Australia and selects one (or more).

- **Final decision stage:** After a final selection of a suitable host country and institution the student submits an application. The final stage of the decision-making processes to study abroad is achieved when the student accepts one offer of admission at a host institution.
This theoretical framework guides the methodology of this study which is described and defended in Chapter 4. Following an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data relating to all research objectives in this study, a slightly revised model of the decision-making processes of European students is presented in Chapter 7.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by highlighting the complex nature of students’ decision-making processes when deciding where to study abroad. It was discussed that students are subject to several key influences which encourage them to leave their home countries to study abroad. Consequently, the push-pull theory was deemed appropriate as a theoretical foundation to this research. In particular, the push-pull theory focuses on influential factors related to the international students’ home and host countries and institutions. However, it was pointed out that in the context of the aim and objectives of this study, there are some limitations to the push-pull theory.
For example, it does not acknowledge the individual characteristics of international students that may account for their decision-making when selecting their study destination. In order to overcome such limitations to the push-pull theory it was argued that the CDM theory is an appropriate and complementary theoretical approach which can extend the push-pull theory because of its focus on capturing the socio-cognitive processes involved in students’ decision-making processes.

Key influences and various personal, and social and economic factors that can potentially affect tertiary students’ decision-making when making decisions about studying abroad were discussed. It was highlighted that the perceived benefits of studying abroad motivate students to study abroad in general, while the recommendations of certain reference groups, and the specific information about study abroad opportunities that students receive via internal or external sources, can influence them during each of the stages of their decision-making process. It was further identified that there is no single criterion that can be applied to all international students, but rather there are a number of motivations and factors influencing prospective international students’ decision-making. It was also argued that the destination country’s image is a highly influential factor in international students’ decision-making, and that Australia’s geographical location is considered to be a potential pull factor. A better understanding of all of these factors, and of the relationships between study abroad and travel and tourism, is crucial if Australia’s international education market is to continue to attract large numbers of international students from around the world.
4 Research approach and methods

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted that students’ decision-making processes are complex and multi-faceted. Accordingly a theoretical conceptual framework, drawing from the push and pull theory of destination choice and CDM theory has been constructed to underpin the empirical study described in this thesis. It was also identified in Chapter 2 that there is a gap in knowledge and understanding of European students’ decision-making practices, and a dearth of research focusing on this particular market. In response to these observations, an exploratory approach was adopted for this research. This chapter outlines and justifies the methodology and methods of data collection that were used in this study.

First, the mixed-methods research approach employed in this study is described and discussed (4.2.1), and the philosophical paradigms underpinning this research are identified (4.2.2). The first section also provides a description of the sequential mixed-methods design applied in this study, and a justification of why this design was chosen instead of a purely qualitative or quantitative design. Second, the methods of data collection and data analysis for the qualitative (4.3) and the quantitative research (4.4) are described. Third, Section 4.5 addresses issues of reliability and validity. The chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations pertaining to this research (4.5) and the limitations of the research design (4.6).

4.2 Methodological framework

Research is an academic process used to improve knowledge and understanding about the world we live in and to find answers to questions by collecting and examining information (Matthews & Ross 2010). Research methodology embraces the whole research process which comprises the techniques of data collection (research methods) and analysis that the researcher applies during the process of
studying the research problem (Creswell 2009; Neuman 2011). The research design provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data, and generally has three components: the connection of philosophical paradigms or worldviews to the study, the strategies of inquiry, and the implementation of specific research methods used in the project (Creswell 2009, pp. 3-16). The following section describes and provides justification of the research design and methods used for this study.

4.2.1 Mixed-methods research

Acknowledging the complex nature of students’ decision-making that was highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, and after debating the relative merits of various paradigms which are further explained below, a mixed-methods approach was deemed the most appropriate to accomplish the research aim and objectives as outlined in Chapter 1. This study utilises a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, where qualitative interviews are the dominant data collection method. In this study, qualitative data provides an explanation of student decision-making by identifying the significant variables involved and their interrelationships. A quantitative survey method is sequentially integrated to confirm the explanation, and to enhance and complement the qualitative data findings.

There has been long-lasting dispute and confusion about the appropriate use of the terminology, and mixed-methods research has been named in many different ways, for example, ‘combined research, mixed methodology, or mixed method’ (Bergman 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). However, in this study, the term mixed-methods research will be consistently used to avoid any misunderstanding.

Traditionally, social science research has taken either a quantitative or qualitative approach. Quantitative research methods often take the form of closed-question surveys with statistical analysis to enhance objectivity and reliability (Golafshani 2003; Kumar 2011). Qualitative data can be collected through a range of data collection methods, for example, case studies, participant observations, group discussions, or interviews (Matthews & Ross 2010).
While these approaches have traditionally stood alone, the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods is now increasingly recognised as the third major research approach in the social sciences (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007; Ridenour & Newman 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010). However, the relatively new mixed-methods research approach has been accompanied by a long period of discussion and debate among researchers during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, during the so-called ‘paradigm war’, a term used to characterise the qualitative and quantitative dichotomy debate (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998), some researchers argued that quantitative methods, which have traditionally been associated with positivism, cannot be mixed with qualitative methods due to their conflicting epistemological assumptions (Bergman 2011). Some researchers argued that methods and paradigms are inseparably linked, emphasising that quantitative and qualitative methods are incompatible and contradictory (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Howe 2004). However, these assertions have since been challenged, with scholars arguing that qualitative and quantitative methods should not be seen as belonging strictly to particular paradigms (Greene & Caracelli 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998). Patton (2002) argues that research methods can be separated from the epistemology from which they emerged, and that it is up to the researcher to determine which methods are most appropriate to answer the research question(s), given the context of the study.

I support these later arguments and believe that methods and epistemology are not necessarily inextricably linked. While paradigms and their related epistemologies and ontologies will have some influence on the research methods used, methods need not be dichotomised and pre-selected according to the underpinning research paradigm utilised in a study. In addition, the position I take is in agreement with Hesse-Biber’s (2010, p. 456) argument that ‘the deployment of a qualitative methodology does not rule out the use of quantitative methods’.

In 2007, Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007, p. 123) define mixed-methods research as follows:

Mixed-method research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research
approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

Johnson and colleagues (2007) provide a graphic representation of the subtypes of mixed-methods research. As can be seen in Figure 15 below, the area in the centre of the figure presents the strongest or ‘pure’ form of mixed-methods research in which the researcher uses qualitative and quantitative methods as equal methods.

![Figure 15: Graphic of the subtypes of mixed-methods research](image)

*Source: Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007, p. 124*

The authors argued that researchers using the pure form of mixed-methods research have confidence that using qualitative and quantitative data and approaches together will add insights into most research questions. However, as shown in Figure 15 above, the balance between qualitative or pure quantitative methods can move in either directions—towards pure qualitative or pure quantitative research. Therefore, mixed-methods research can be more qualitative or more quantitative in nature. Qualitative-dominant mixed-methods research (QUAL +quan research) ’is the type of mixed research in which one relies on a qualitative, constructivist-poststructuralist-critical view of the research, while currently recognising that the addition of quantitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects’ (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007, p. 123). Conversely, quantitative dominant mixed-methods research (QUAN +qual) relies on a quantitative, post-
A positivist view of the research process. However, most researchers mix their dominant research method with another method. For the purposes of this research, which seeks to gain a rich and deep understanding of European students’ decision-making and travel behaviours when studying abroad, a QUAL-dominant approach to mixed-methods research is the most appropriate one.

**Advantage of mixed-methods research**

The aim of mixed-methods research is to utilise the relevant characteristics and advantages of both methodologies in order to produce data that are as accurate as possible, and to solve human problems in a way that neither qualitative nor quantitative methods can accomplish alone (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007; Morse 1991; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010). Particularly in social research, embracing multiple perspectives, theories, and quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study has become more attractive to many researchers and is understood as a complementary approach to research (Johnson & Christensen 2012).

Creswell (2009) argued that applying mixed-methods as a research design has the advantage of gathering both numeric and textual information which can be merged in the final data set to represent the reality that is being examined. Creswell also argued that mixed-methods research is an effective technique for elaborating on the findings of previous studies, to gain a more profound understanding of phenomena and improve validity. According to Creswell this allows researchers to be more confident about their results.

Hesse-Bibe (2010, p. 466) suggests that linking qualitative and quantitative methods can enhance the validity and reliability of findings. If similar questions are asked in both the qualitative and quantitative studies, the researcher can ascertain the extent to which the research findings a) yield similar responses (reliability), and b) ‘appear to get at the same underlying issues such that there is general agreement in their responses (triangulation with the goal of increasing the validity of a study)’ (Hesse-Biber 2010). Mixed-methods incorporates the advantages of both approaches, for example, the generalisability of quantitative research approaches and the more detailed, contextual nature of qualitative results (Greene & Caracelli 1997;
Tashakkori & Teddie 2003). I believe that collecting data from different sources in a single study design was an advantage as it offered scope for triangulation of the data in order to explore questions more deeply and cross-check the findings in the end (Matthews & Ross 2010).

Although qualitative and quantitative methods are different in many ways, it is important to recognise their individual strengths and limitations and to acknowledge that they can complement each other (Creswell 2009). However, there are also some potential disadvantages that researchers must be aware of when choosing to use mixed-methods. As already outlined above, a central scholarly criticism of mixed-methods research has argued that quantitative and qualitative methods are incompatible due to fundamental differences in the assumptions (epistemological, ontological, and axiological) between the different paradigms commonly associated with the two types of method (Howe 2004; Tashakkori & Teddie 2003). Bergman (2011) argues the challenge remains how to combine a perspective that relates to objective, unbiased and value-free research, with a perspective that embraces subjectivity, researcher context and value-laden research. He suggests it is important that mixed-methods research projects embrace epistemology and ontology, research questions, theoretical frameworks, sampling strategies and interpretations that are conducive to both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data adds complexity to the research project, and involves more time and financial costs. Moreover, it is often more difficult to replicate a mixed-method study (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007; Neuman 2011). However, in the context of this study it is argued that the advantages of data triangulation outweigh the disadvantages.

4.2.1.1 Rationale for using a qualitatively driven approach to mixed-methods research

It was the aim of this study to select research methods that were best suited to answering the research questions rather than to select methods simply because they connect to the epistemological and ontological positions commonly associated with
a certain paradigm. After the review of the literature, a discussion with the researcher’s supervisors and other academics in the field during the Australian International Education Conference in 2011, a qualitatively driven mixed-methods research design (QUAL+quan) was employed to investigate the complex decision-making processes of European students who choose to study abroad.

In this study, mixed-methods were utilised in a two-phase sequential exploratory design with the sequential application, firstly of qualitative and secondly of quantitative procedures (Creswell 2009, p. 210). As can be seen in Figure 16 (see page 129), the quantitative phase was employed to triangulate the results from the pre- and post-study abroad interviews. Several key reasons underpin the decision to use this approach. First, I was primarily interested in developing a detailed understanding of European students’ decision-making processes when they choose to study abroad, their expectations before going to Australia, and their experiences and travel behaviour while in Australia. Considering that these students come from different countries and English is not their first language, it would have been difficult to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon and to capture the effect of cultural differences among these students (if there are any) in a quantitative survey. Further, the research objectives of this study required an exploratory approach due to a lack of substantive literature for this cohort. Therefore, conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with a limited number of participants first was considered to be a more appropriate way to obtain rich data derived from detailed insights into the phenomena under investigation (Silverman 2010). The results of the interview data subsequently informed the development of the survey questionnaire.

Second, the quantitative survey method was implemented in this study to confirm, supplement and test the validity of qualitative data on a wider sample (Bergman 2011; Hesse-Biber 2010). I was interested in assessing whether the dimensions identified from the interviews were generalisable to a larger population, and this larger-scale quantitative survey allowed for population inference. The two research approaches complemented each other to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being examined. In addition, to include a larger sample of European
students via a supplementary quantitative survey may address the concerns of those who value numbers and a larger sample (Creswell et al. 2006).

As has been discussed, the qualitative data collection phase was given primary emphasis in this study. This qualitative phase was grounded in an interpretive epistemology and ontology. A post-positivist epistemology and ontology guided the quantitative data collection. The two philosophical approaches underpinning this research inquiry are explained in the next section.

4.2.2 Guiding research paradigms

Within the social sciences several philosophical approaches support social inquiry, offering different ways to view and understand the social world. These approaches are often referred to as paradigms or worldviews and ‘are basic set of beliefs’ related to the epistemological, ontological and methodological principles by which researchers conduct their research (Guba 1990, p. 19).

A number of different theoretical paradigms have been developed in the natural and social sciences. The most common paradigms are the positivist/post-positivist paradigms; the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, and critical theory (Neuman 2011). Other relevant paradigms in social science have emerged over time such as the pragmatic, feminist, and postmodernist paradigms, as well as chaos theory, ethnic studies, cultural studies and queer theory (Denzin & Lincoln 2011).

Two paradigms, interpretivism and post-positivism, have guided this research and are explained in more detail in this section.

4.2.2.1 Interpretive paradigm guiding the qualitative data collection

Interpretivism emerged in the early 1980s and is often referred to as naturalistic social inquiry (Guba 1990). The interpretivist social science paradigm is mainly influenced by the German philosophers Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) and Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and sociologist Max Weber’s (1864–1920) approach of
‘Verstehen’ (Neuman 2011, p. 101). Weber’s approach aimed to understand humans’ lived experiences in specific historical settings. Weber argued that social science should study social action with a clear purpose and should be a more empathetic process of understanding the social world (Rossi 1994).

The interpretivist social science paradigm assumes an intersubjective world with ‘multiple realities’ in which human beings construct their own social realities (Jennings 2001; Patton 2002). These realities and the complexity of views are defined as those that have been adopted by participants, the researcher and any reader of the social inquiry (Creswell 2009). Thus, researchers can only present this social reality and explain the participants’ points of view by exploring and describing the richness, depth, and complexity of phenomena rather than by using statistical procedures, as is common in positivist approaches. The researcher takes an emic (insider’s) view by entering the social world of the research participants and having direct personal contact with them, subsequently developing an intersubjective relationship and understanding with them (Jennings 2001; Neuman 2011). By the mid-to-late 1990s, qualitative research had become widely accepted as a useful approach to exploring complex phenomena of which there was little knowledge, and to describe complex ‘personal and interpersonal phenomena that would be impossible to portray with quantitative research’s single dimensional scales’ (Krathwohl 2009, p. 237).

Nevertheless, the chosen research paradigm for each inquiry depends on the researcher’s perceptions of ‘what the real world truth is’ (ontology) and ‘how they know it to be real truth’ (epistemology) (Tuli 2011, p. 103). In addition, the paradigm(s) selected, depends on the kind of research questions and the way the researcher generates the data to address them (methodology). The assumptions associated with a chosen research paradigm have implications related to the approach taken to collect and later analyse the raw data; to the role of the researcher (objective versus subjective) in the whole research process; and to the presentation of the research outcomes (Creswell 1994).
More recently, many researchers including Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), Bergman (2008) and Krathwohl (2009) view qualitative and quantitative methods as complementary and call for reconciliation between quantitative and qualitative paradigmatic approaches. They argue that researchers should utilise a mixed-methods design if this appears to be most appropriate approach for their investigation as this will strengthen their research. Creswell (2009) states that circumstances may arise in which the use of a single paradigm is not appropriate. Creswell further argues that in such a situation, it is becoming increasingly common for a researcher to combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study to form a mixed-methods study.

**Ontology and epistemology of the interpretive paradigm**

In the interpretive paradigm the researcher is ‘value-laden and biased’ while gathering qualitative data from relatively few cases (Neuman 2011). Bryman (2004, p. 279) argues that ‘the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world’. Furthermore, Bryman states that ‘the empathetic stance of seeking to see through the eyes of one’s research participants is very much in tune with interpretivism and demonstrates well the epistemological links with phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ‘Verstehen’.

The interpretivist social science paradigm used in the qualitative phase of this study relates to Jennings’ (2001, pp. 40-41) assumptions that:

- Multiple explanations or realities are considered to explain the study abroad phenomenon (*ontological basis*).

- The research process is subjective and the relationship between the researcher and the participants is intersubjective.

- Data are collected from an insider’s perspective in the real world settings of European students (*epistemological basis*).
The interpretivist paradigm helped me to explore the context and gain an understanding of the decision-making processes of European students who chose to study in Australia. Essentially, I wanted to understand what is relevant to these students and relied upon their views, feelings, experiences and interpretations of their study abroad journey (Neuman 2011). Furthermore, I agree with Creswell (2009) that different elements such as the time and setting (where and when the research is undertaken), the cultural background of the participants, and also my own background, values and experience, have an impact on the research design and the interpretation of the gathered data in this study (axiological basis). My situatedness as researcher will be further outlined in Section 4.2.4. It was necessary to incorporate the context and further, to understand these students’ experiences when selecting their study abroad destination. Therefore, the interviews using open-ended questions appeared to be the best approach for capturing European students’ perspectives about the study abroad phenomenon and the implications associated with those perspectives (Patton 2002).

4.2.2.2 Post-positivism paradigm guiding the quantitative data collection

Positivism is associated with more traditional forms of research. The roots of positivism date back to the nineteenth century and are based on the philosophical ideas of French sociologist Auguste Comte (Neuman 2011, p. 95). Positivism relates to an objective world with only one reality which scientific methods can more or less readily represent, measure and quantify. In social science, many researchers moved on from the positivist to the post-positivist paradigm which aims to produce generalisable knowledge about social patterns (Creswell 2009). Post-positivists believe that all observations are theory-laden, that knowledge is not value-free and that researchers are inherently biased by their cultural experiences and world views (Guba 1990). Thus, true objective knowledge is difficult, or even impossible, to accomplish. Further, post-positivism acknowledges that observations are not fixed and are open to change within their context. As all measurement is fallible, post-positivism emphasises the importance of multiple measures and observations and
the need to use triangulation across these multiple sources to achieve a better view of reality (Creswell 2009; Guba 1990). In contrast to the interpretivist paradigm, post-positivist research is most often associated with quantitative methods of data collection from large numbers of individuals and analysis which seeks to measure and generate outcomes more value-free that apply to a wider population from which the research sample was obtained (Neuman 2011).

**Ontology and epistemology of the post-positivist paradigm**

The post-positivist paradigm related to the quantitative method used in my study is underpinned by the following assumptions (adapted from Creswell, 2009 and Neuman, 2011):

- Knowledge about the study abroad phenomenon comes from the many realities of the participants; the researcher is sceptical about the ability to know reality with certainty (*ontological basis*).

- The research process is classified as being ‘modified objective’, as the development of the questionnaire was influenced by a biased pre-selection process in which the researcher collected only specific data (*epistemological basis*).

- The researcher’s values are kept out of the data collection process (*axiological basis*).

Table 6 below summarises the underlying assumptions of the interpretivist and post-positivist paradigms in relation to my research.
Table 6: Summary of the underlying assumptions of the interpretive and post-positivist paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interpretivist Paradigm (Qualitative)</th>
<th>Post-positivist Paradigm (Quantitative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology</strong></td>
<td>Multiple realities</td>
<td>‘Ultimate truth’ is unknowable (Knowledge comes from many realities rather than one reality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Modified objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiology</strong></td>
<td>The researcher acknowledges bias and own worldviews</td>
<td>The researcher’s values are primarily kept out of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology/study design</strong></td>
<td>Inductive-emergent (Adopts an inductive logic, whereby thematic categories emerge from information given by participants)</td>
<td>Deductive logic/modified manipulative (Numerical evidence is gathered and analysed to corroborate, prove or disprove findings of the interviews)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from (Creswell 2009; Guba 1990; Krathwohl 2009; Neuman 2011)

4.2.3 Research design

**Exploratory, sequential mixed-methods design**

This study adopted a two-phase exploratory mixed-methods design with a sequential application of first qualitative and second quantitative procedures (Creswell 2009). In a sequential design, the data collected in the first phase contributes to the development of the next phase of data collection. Therefore, one type of question is addressed by collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data one after another. In a concurrent design, the data are collected concurrently, and then analysed to answer the research question(s) (Creswell 2009). I followed Kumar’s recommendation to start with qualitative methods in order to ‘determine the spread of diversity’, and to use quantitative methods to quantify the spread (2005, p. 105). Consequently, after the literature review (Stage 1); the study proceeded with two more research stages. These stages comprised a qualitative interview method as the dominant approach (Stage 2), followed by a quantitative, survey method (Stage 3) to supplement the data findings from the interviews (Stage 2).

Figure 16 below presents the mixed-method design for the present study. In order to scope the framework of this research an extensive review of policy, academic literature and statistics was undertaken to describe and analyse the situation of
international students and their behaviour as tourists globally, and in Australia (Stage 1). Areas of study included psychology (benefits, preferences, motivations), sociology (behaviours, networks), economics (costs, expenditure), and management (services, impacts). This secondary analysis of data from various sources of documented information was undertaken to identify, understand and clarify the context and nature of the research phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen 2012; Matthews & Ross 2010).

**Figure 16: Illustration of mixed-methods research design for this study**

In Stage 2, qualitative data were collected in order to explore, understand and then describe the factors that influence European students’ decisions to study in Australia. During this stage, semi-structured interviews with 29 participants were carried out on two occasions: before they started their study abroad semester in Australia (pre-SA interview), and after they had finished their semester (post-SA interview). The qualitative data process generated interviewer field notes and transcripts of, in total, 58 interviews. After transcribing, coding and analysing the interviews the researcher moved on to Stage 3 of the study, the quantitative phase. An online survey was developed and administered to European tertiary students who had finished their study abroad semester in Australia. The higher priority given to the qualitative component is revealed by the more in-depth analysis of the qualitative themes, and
also by the fact that more space is devoted to the qualitative results than to the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). The two techniques are further explained in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

4.2.4 Locating the researcher

Qualitative researchers should be conscious of the ‘biases, values, and experiences’ they bring to a research study and need to ‘position’ themselves in the writing (Creswell 2012, p. 216) This evokes the concept of reflexivity in which the qualitative researcher acknowledges past experiences and knowledge they have gained within the field of study and also raises the question of how these backgrounds and beliefs ‘shape the researcher’s interpretation of the phenomenon’ (Creswell 2012, p. 216). According to Hollinshead and Jamal (2007, p. 102) reflexivity has as its focus ‘a general and continued self-awareness about the ongoing relationship between the researcher and his/her informants’.

Therefore, in this section I locate myself within the field of study and describe my interest in the international education market in general, and in particular, in the Australian education market. I am a German citizen and an Australian resident and besides living in Germany I have spent several months each year in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand over the last 16 years.

I have worked as a freelancer for business developments in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand over a period of ten years. Besides interacting with key players in relevant international education institutions in order to establish and maintain relationships with partner offices, I have also been working with German tertiary students participating in internship programs in those countries. I have given information seminars in Germany on internship, work and travel as well as on study opportunities in Australia and New Zealand to enable students to put their international study projects into action and to prepare students for the cultural aspects of their stays abroad. Additionally, my experience as a ‘student administration assistant’, which has involved helping international students to enrol
and accurately complete their study timetable at the Sydney campus of Central Queensland University, gave me insights into the international student market.

From the tourism sector perspective, my experience in assisting with the development of a ‘discount card for tourism products in Australia’ for the German market gave me insights into the tourism market in Australia. Furthermore, I worked as a freelancer over a period of five years in Sydney and was responsible for various ethnographic studies for the German Future institute’s ‘Ears and Eyes’ and ‘See MORE’ programs. Among other projects, I have worked on international tourism studies for the client TUI AG to develop ideas for new offers for the tourism industry, in particular for the TUI brand and its sub-brands. TUI AG is a travel agent and the most recognised travel brand throughout Europe.

Finally, the research and interviews with representatives in international education conducted by myself for my book ‘Language travelling in Australia and New Zealand’ (Muschter 2009) sparked my interest in this research area and in better understanding the Australian educational and tourism market, especially in regards to why and how European tertiary students decide to temporarily study in Australia. Finally, although I am not officially counted under the international student category because I am in Australia as an Australian resident, due to my experiences of preparing for and undertaking my PhD journey, I can certainly relate to the experiences of international students.

This personal history had implications for the design and structure of the research procedures, particularly the qualitative interviews, and therefore the study could not be entirely objective. However, the interpretivist social science paradigm allows data to be collected from an insider’s perspective. In educational and tourism research, studies are often conducted from an insider’s perspective (Jennings 2001). As outlined above, I have been engaged in the field of international education for a significant period. Thus, I am aware that I am able to take an insider’s perspective. This has not been a methodological choice on the part of the researcher, but rather a given. It allows me to be transparent and constantly reflect on my own engagement and experiences in the field. Hall (2004, p. 150) regards reflexivity ‘as critical to all
tourism practice’. This makes one vulnerable and allows a researcher to locate and understand the links between self and action.

So far, this chapter has presented the methodological framework of this study and discussed why mixed-methods research was selected as the most appropriate design. The next two sections discuss the procedures adopted to undertake the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research.

4.3 Qualitative research

4.3.1 Interview design

I followed Neuman’s (2011) approach of using semi-structured interviews as the initial data collection method as the best way to explore the participants’ perspectives on the research questions in-depth. These interviews were undertaken to capture the diversity of students’ experiences, and to gain knowledge and a more specific understanding of European students’ overall decision-making when selecting Australia as their temporary study destination.

The semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask specific questions in direct and interactive conversations with the interviewees. This suited the exploratory nature of this research as it also brought enough flexibility to accommodate new insights that the interviewees provided. I was able to offer the participants the opportunity to talk about issues and experiences that were important to them, and to clarify any questions they may have had (Krathwohl 2009). I felt that this approach would not only provide a better understanding of the research phenomenon but also offer more comfort for the interviewees.

Interviews can be undertaken either face-to-face, or at a distance via telephone or the internet. They can be either in one-to-one or focus group sessions (Kumar 2011; Matthews & Ross 2010). The pre-SA interviews were undertaken as face-to-face interviews with 14 of the 29 interview participants, either in Germany or Australia. According to Neuman (2011) face-to-face interviews have the highest response rate
of all interview types and also provide a good rapport between researcher and participant through visual and auditory interaction. However, they are time consuming and expensive in travel costs. Skype interviews were undertaken with 15 interviewees as they allowed for face-to-face interaction and overcame the barriers of geographical distance. Further, from a practical perspective, Skype-facilitated interviews were a flexible, time- and cost-effective method as students were located in nine European countries. The disadvantage of the Skype interviews is that the quality depends on a strong internet connection on both, the researcher’s and the participant’s side. Table 7 below summarises the characteristics of the two interview data collection forms utilised in this study.

Table 7: Characteristics of face-to-face and Skype interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Face-to-Face Interview</th>
<th>Skype Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
<td>No costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time consuming</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probes possible</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer bias</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate to high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of non-verbal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low to Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of data collection</td>
<td>Depends upon the quality of interaction and abilities of the interviewer</td>
<td>Depends upon the quality of interaction and abilities of the interviewer, and on the internet reception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from (Kumar 2011, p. 150; Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008, pp. 5-58)

4.3.2 Development of questions for pre- and post-study abroad interviews

The development of the questions for the semi-structured interview guide was directed primarily by the need to address the research objectives which were to:

- Examine the influences on and steps involved in European students' decision-making processes to temporarily study in Australia.
Research approach and methods

- Explore the relationships between international education and tourism from the perspective of these students.

- Explore the extent to which European students’ expectations of life, study and travel in Australia are being met.

Furthermore, the questions for the pre- and post-study abroad interviews (referred in this study to pre-SA and post-SA interviews) aimed to cover a sequence of themes gleaned from the literature review as described in Chapters 2 and 3.

Semi-structured interviews have been characterised as using an interview guide containing a predetermined and standardised set of questions, and the incorporation of open-ended questions permits an unlimited number of possible answers (Kvale 2006). As both these features appeared appropriate for this research, a set of interview questions was prepared in advance. The interview guide combined a variety of open and then more focused questions to obtain the individual views of the interviewees on the research topic without presenting a list of possible answers (Flick 2011). The use of an interview guide increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection more systematic for each participant.

The guides for the pre- and post-SA interviews were designed in a way that meant each interview began with a few descriptive questions and then followed the funnelling method (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008). Funnelling is a useful three-step approach in which the interview starts with some general questions, and then the researcher narrows the focus by asking probing and more specific questions to elicit information about a smaller area. If appropriate, to conclude a section the researcher can ask closed questions to summarise and clarify the information given by the interviewee.

The pre- and post-SA question guides each had six categories. The pre-SA guide had 44 questions and the post-SA guide had 39 (see Appendices 2 and 3). The six categories in the pre-SA interview were: demographic information, institutional information, economic, environmental and tourism factors influencing students’ decision to study in Australia. Further, questions about interviewees’ expectations of
their upcoming Australian sojourn were asked. The post-SA interview categories were designed to be closely related to the categories of the pre-SA interview questions. These were related to exploring students’ experiences of living, study and travelling in Australia and to ascertaining whether their expectations of their overall time in Australia had been met.

Prior to both sets of interview data collection the questions that formed the interviews were scrutinised by my supervisors to improve their readability and to ensure they would result in data that addressed my research objectives. In addition, to ensure that interview questions are easy to understand for non-English speakers, a trial run was carried out with three international students studying at SCU. As a result of this procedure, amendments in wording of three questions were made for the pre-SA interview guide which further improved it. The same procedure was undertaken for the post-SA interview guide without any amendments being necessary.

4.3.3 Sampling strategies

The purpose of sampling is to identify, select and gain access to relevant data sources for the study (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008). Kumar (2011, p. 193) describes sampling as ‘the process of selecting a few participants from a bigger group of a population’ that the researcher is interested in. Kumar states further that this selected sample becomes ‘the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group [the sampling population]’ (2011, p. 193).

In this study, non-probability, judgemental, and purposive sampling strategies were used to select the interview participants (Kumar 2011; Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008). I selected the participants purposively on the basis of their characteristics and experiences which were directly related to the research topic. There was no attempt at the qualitative stage of the research to create a statistically relevant sample of the European student population, rather, the aim was to focus on the exploration and interpretation of experiences and perceptions of a few cases that could reveal most
about the research area (Matthews & Ross 2010). I selected cases for the interviews partly on the basis of convenience and by using a snowball technique. Snowball sampling is the process of using networks by contacting a few individuals in a group or organisation and asking them to put the researcher in touch with people in their networks (Kumar 2011). Furthermore, an ‘opt-in’ sampling method was used. In ‘opt-in’ sampling the sample population is informed about the interviews and can choose to participate or choose not to do so (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007).

**Population of interviewees**

The population for the qualitative data collection included European tertiary students who had already decided to participate in a temporary study program in Australia as part of their study curriculum at their home institution. To create a culturally homogenous sample of European students it was decided to approach only students who came from European countries which did not belong to the former ‘Eastern-bloc’ and who met the following criteria:

a) being currently enrolled either in a bachelor’s or master’s program at their home institution

b) not coming from an English-speaking country including England, Scotland and Ireland

c) undertaking one or two study semesters in Australia commencing in the next three months as part of their degree program at the home university.

Improving linguistic abilities has been found to be one of the most common stated professional motivations to study abroad (Vossensteyn et al. 2010). This does not apply to native English speakers. I was also aware of the fact that students from various European countries do not necessarily have similar cultural backgrounds. However, my assumption was that students from Western European countries might share more similarities in relation to their cultures, economics, educational and political systems than students from former ‘Eastern-bloc’ countries. Consequently, students from the above mentioned English-speaking and former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe were excluded from the qualitative data collection.
process. However, I am acknowledging that there are still cultural differences between these Western European countries. Furthermore, the aim was to include both females and males (but not necessarily in equal numbers) and students studying in exchange programs or as free-movers.

**Recruitment of interviewees**

I implemented a number of strategies to recruit interview participants. First, educational agencies in European including Germany, Italy, France, Austria and Scandinavian countries were approached to obtain candidates for the interviews. Agencies in these countries were approached for two reasons: a) universities in these countries had the highest percentage of students participating in a SA-program in Australia, and b) I had knowledge of and contact with these agencies. The role of educational agencies which support international students who are interested to study in Australia has been described in Section 3.4. As their service is free, many students use these agencies.

Therefore, to approach these agencies was deemed the most appropriate course of action and also the most promising way to reach a sufficient number of interview participants. Agencies were either contacted by telephone or via email and the purpose of the research was explained. If the agency agreed to forward my request, all relevant information including the ethics approval, interview questionnaire, the focus of the study and a letter to the students were provided via email. The agencies informed their students via email and provided information about the research project as well as my contact details. In order to encourage participation, in this email I offered to share my comprehensive knowledge and practical information about studying in Australia with the participants after the interview. Students who decided to take part in this study replied via email. I then contacted the respondents via email or telephone to provide more information about the interview procedure and to arrange an interview time at their convenience. Prospective interviewees were also informed that their involvement in both interviews was on a voluntary basis and that they could withdraw their participation in the interviews at any time.
In addition, I successfully undertook two other steps to find more participants for the qualitative interviews by using networks. I asked participants after the first interview to identify fellow students who were going to undertake a study semester in Australia soon and who fulfilled the sampling criteria. Furthermore, I approached people working in study abroad offices at my own university, SCU, and other universities in Australia directly. I encountered these people at a number of international education conferences and asked them to forward my interview request to their future European study abroad students. Altogether, 29 students from nine European countries agreed to participate in the interviews.

**Sample size and data saturation**

As Silverman (2010) claims, it is not the sample size that is important in qualitative research. Purposive sampling requires that the researcher thinks critically about any parameters and choose the sample carefully to reflect the population under study. Patton argues that there ‘are no rules for sample size in quality inquiry’, no clear guidelines or any established process (Patton 2002, p. 244). Thus, the question of how many people need to be interviewed is a difficult one to answer ahead of time, and it is up to the researcher to determine at what point enough data has been collected (Kumar 2011).

I had no initial plan of how many European students I needed to interview. The actual number of 29 semi-structured interviews was based on several considerations. I transcribed and undertook a preliminary analysis of the interviews shortly after they were conducted. Thus, I was able to recognise emerging categories and themes through the ongoing process of data collection. After the first 22 interviews were conducted I realised that not much new information was emerging, and that a good coverage of the research issues under investigation had been achieved. This supported the identification of saturation of the data. However, another seven interviews were conducted until I was completely satisfied that different nationalities, genders and study groups were represented, and that the data were rich enough and covered different dimensions of the inquiry (Kumar 2011; Patton 2002).
4.3.4 Data collection

Altogether, 58 interviews, two interviews with each of the same 29 participants from nine European countries, were conducted either face-to-face or via Skype pre- and post of their study abroad program in Australia. All interviews were audio recorded in order to make a full and accurate record, and to leave the interviewer free to be a thoughtful listener (Flick 2011; Kumar 2011). However, the audio recording using either the QuickTime application of my computer or the voice memo program of my iPhone only started after the participants agreed to the recording and indicated that they were ready to begin the interview.

The prepared semi-structured question schedule guided the interviews. However, the interviews still remained conversational and situational as it was free to decide on the sequence and wording of questions (Patton 2002). The aim of the interviews was to allow the participants to present their views and perceptions on the research topic with minimal influence from the interviewer. Thus, the participants were encouraged to answer the questions as freely and comprehensively as they wished. Nevertheless, at the same time I was able to lead the discussion about the research topic into greater depth (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008). As interviewees were diverse in several ways (for example, some were free-movers and others were exchange students) not all questions were asked as they sometimes did not apply to particular interviewees. However, the questions were asked in a way that maintained the flow of the interviews and left space for additional questions, different follow-up probes and prompts in order to discover unanticipated findings (Flick 2011; Kumar 2011).

All interviews were conducted in English – with an exception of some pre-SA interviews which will be explained in Section 4.3.4.1. While English is neither my own mother language nor that of the interviewees, its use provided a consistent platform for the multi-linguistic participants. I was confident that there would not be a language issue as the interviewees had to prove that their English proficiency was at an acceptable level before they were accepted to study in Australia. However, as language plays an important role in qualitative interviews it seemed necessary to
develop and use a semi-structured interview guide with clear, straightforward questions to avoid any misunderstandings (Kvale 2006).

In order to overcome language and possible cultural issues, additional forms of probing were used. I encouraged the participants when they struggled to find the right English words and sometimes I repeated the participant’s answer to show I was paying attention, to ensure their comments were understood correctly, and to show they were valued. Furthermore, I gave interviewees time for comments and elaboration (Kumar 2011).

After each interview I created Microsoft Word tables to keep track of all relevant participant information. In addition, I wrote notes and comments on topics that seemed important in a research journal immediately after the interview.

4.3.4.1 Pre-study abroad interviews

As seen in Table 8 (see page 142) the pre-SA interviews were collected in two time periods: the first period involved 22 interviews between June and September 2011; the second set of seven interviews were conducted in February 2012. As my mother tongue is German, German participants were given the option to undertake the first interview in English or in German.

I offered this option in order to allow the interviewees to express themselves and discuss their experiences as freely and deeply as possible. People who share a common mother tongue will use that common language to communicate, because to converse in their mother tongue gives them a sense of security and strength and doing otherwise would be unnatural (Witsel 2001). I felt that if I did not offer to communicate in German with the German interviewees and thereby make the researcher and the interviewees more comfortable, I may have introduced what Verluyten (2000) called psychological noise and as a result, there may have been potential for attribution errors. All German students took the offer although some interviewees tried to talk in English at the beginning and at times during the interview, but then switched back to German for their own convenience. However,
the questions were asked in English in all interviews to maintain consistency. All interviewees had a good level of English and there was no indication that the interviews with non-German participants yielded data that was qualitatively less rich because they were conducted in English. Although the German students had the added option to speak in German, I communicated successfully with each of the interviewees as our next common language was English.

Carrying out the research interviews was an iterative process. For example after the first five interviews, I asked the interviewees if all interview questions were clear and easy to understand, and what they thought about the style and length of the interview. I then transcribed these interviews straight away and read the transcripts carefully in order to become familiar with the data. As a result of this process, I changed the order of two interview questions before the next 24 interviews. I also removed one question about economic expenses as it did not seem relevant to my research objectives.

4.3.4.2 Post-study abroad semester interviews

The question schedule for the post-SA interviews was developed after the data collected from the first set of 22 pre-study interviews were transcribed and preliminary coding and analysing were undertaken. Before the second interview with each participant was conducted, the transcript of the first interview was carefully studied to give me the opportunity to relate and connect questions in the second interview to expectations and statements of the participant in the first interview.

The same 29 students were interviewed again after their study abroad semester was finished. The interview date was set to the participant’s convenience. Around half of the students were interviewed face-to-face (14), often just a few days before they left Australia or while they were still travelling in Australia after their study abroad semesters. Eight other students were interviewed via Skype after they were already back in their home countries. All post-SA interviews were conducted in English. Although I offered the German interviewees the option of answering in German they all insisted on being interviewed in English as they felt really confident speaking in
English after their time in Australia. Table 8 below provides information about how and when the pre- and post-SA interviews were undertaken.

Table 8: Overview of pre- and post-SA interview data collection time frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Face to-Face</th>
<th>Skype</th>
<th>Data collection period</th>
<th>Length of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-SA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>June to September 2011</td>
<td>Shortest: 23 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
<td>Longest: 75 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average: 40 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Post-SA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dec 2011 to March 2012</td>
<td>Shortest: 30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>August to October 2012</td>
<td>Longest: 64 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average: 43 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verbatim transcriptions of the post-SA interviews were completed by the researcher shortly after the data were collected. Both the pre- and post-SA interview transcripts were then sent to interviewees who were interested to receive them in order to provide member checking.

4.3.5 Data analysis of interviews

A variety of strategies have been used and developed over time to analyse qualitative research data, including content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory and thematic analysis, of which there are a number of variations (Braun & Clarke 2006; Bryman 2004; Creswell 2003).

A criticism of qualitative data analysis has been that it is seen as too exploratory, a subjective process in which, for example, only the researcher hears the interviews or reads the transcripts, and with no universal means of analysis accepted (Hewitt-Taylor 2011). To address this critique and to ensure that the analysis of the interviews was credible and transparent, the data analysis methods were undertaken systematically and with a focus on addressing the research questions (Kvale 2006; Matthews & Ross 2010). Given the important role that data analysis plays in determining the quality of a study, details about the different steps taken and how the interview data was analysed are discussed in this section.
Thematic analysis

The qualitative interview data in this study were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible research tool which is ‘essentially independent of any pre-existing theoretical frameworks or ontology, and epistemology, and can be applied to a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches’ (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 5). The focus of thematic analysis is to identify meaningful categories that can be grouped into themes emerging from the transcripts of the collected interviews through a systematic examination and re-examination of the data (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008). Many researchers share guidelines and suggestions on how to make sense of qualitative data and transform this data into findings. However, as Patton (2002, p. 432) points out: ‘No formula exists for that transformation … direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when-and if-arrived at’.

In this study I adopted a qualitative data analysis process similar to that described by Creswell (2009, pp. 183-190), Braun and Clark (2006, pp. 17-23) and Green et al. (2007, pp. 546-549). First, the different terms were clarified. Then the step-by-step data analysis procedure which was undertaken was developed. The different analytical steps were taken simultaneously and systematically, rather than sequentially, as I moved forward and back through the interview transcripts, reviewing, adapting or changing codes and categories several times in the process.

Different terms such as concepts, coding or codes, creating category and identifying themes are used interchangeably in the literature to describe the qualitative analysis process (Johnson & Christensen 2012). To describe the analytical process of this study, the researcher follows Johnson and Christensen’s definitions of different terms (2012, pp. 520-530). The term coding describes the process of marking segments of data with colours, symbols, descriptive words, or category names while ‘codes are tags or labels used to assign units of meaning to the descriptive or interferential information compiled during a study’ (Johnson & Christensen 2012, p. 520). Segmenting involves locating meaningful segments of data and goes hand in hand with coding (p. 521). The term category refers to the descriptive level of coding in which a set of categories of collected data forms a classification system to
characterise those data (p. 528). The term *theme* is used to describe elements identified from the data (categories and codes) which capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and which represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Bazeley 2009).

4.3.5.1 A thematic analysis of interview data

**Step One: data managing (organisation and preparation of the interview data)**

The inductive analysis of the qualitative data started immediately after each interview by writing notes in order to develop early ideas and reflections on the data. The more formal analysis process started with a verbatim transcription as outlined above. All interview transcripts were uploaded into QSR NVivo, using NVivo version 9 first and 10 later. NVivo is a qualitative data management and analysis software program (Bryman 2004). However, I decided to undertake the first step of the analysis process manually to immerse myself in the data. The NVivo software was an important tool for storing, organising and accessing the raw interview data. Furthermore, NVivo facilitated the analytical process as I organised segments of text and quotes from participants under different categories and codes (or nodes) after the manual open coding process was finished.

**Step Two: data immersion and first steps of manual open coding**

In order to immerse myself in the data and become familiar with the data as a whole (Braun & Clarke 2006; Creswell 2009) I thoroughly and repeatedly reviewed all interview transcripts and notes from the data collection process. First, I read each transcript without highlighting or taking notes but with the aim of gaining a general understanding of the information given by the interviewees. Second, the transcripts were read again, line by line, to allow a more detailed examination of what was said in order to reflect on their overall meaning and to identify data related to the research questions (Creswell 2009; Green, J et al. 2007).

During the second data review, manual open, inductive coding started, significant remarks and segments of text were highlighted, and notes were made in the margins of the transcript. At this stage important information from all 15 German pre-SA...
interview transcripts were summarised in English and written beside the comments of the interviewees which were given in German. In addition, to describe some features of the sample and to reduce the amount of raw data, questions which had generated a categorical, more quantitative response were selected, highlighted and labelled (Bazeley 2009). This included for example demographic information about the interviewees such as age, gender, nationality, their study semester and program, and numerical information such as the number of weeks they studied, travelled or worked in Australia. Furthermore, data from questions which only had a limited set of answers, or which seemed informative but not too closely related to the research question, were selected. A Word document and an Excel spread sheet were created to capture and extract all of this information. The Excel spread sheet providing an overview of interviewees’ demographics is attached in Appendix 4.

**Step Three: the process of focused coding utilising NVivo software**

A process of a second, more focused coding was undertaken through NVivo in Stage Three. Focused coding follows the open or initial coding process and entails going through the data line by line again to search for the most frequent or significant initial codes identified during the open coding (Saldaña 2009). I reviewed the manually highlighted words or text segments and summarised notes from a few transcripts. After this review, a first list of different categories with codes and sub-codes was developed. These codes were listed as nodes in NVivo (see Appendix 5).

While working with the NVivo program, I repeated the manual process of highlighting relevant segments of the transcript (such as words, phrases or paragraphs) and added them either to an existing code or created a new code. However, going through the data again, I remained open to new codes emerging or codes that seemed related to each other and collapsed them into one (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thus, the inductive category and code list was continuously emphasised during the process of reviewing each transcript a third time. A memo written under each code to capture significant information related to that code. This memo allowed the researcher and others (for example supervisors) to understand the background to each code even at a later stage. At the end of this stage several transcripts were shared with a fellow PhD
student to check my interpretations of the data. These transcripts were coded by the other student and discussed.

**Step Four: collating categories and codes to identify themes**

After the two-step coding process (open and focused) I considered how these initial codes could be organised and linked to generate key themes and a thick description about all relevant information in the data. In this process, which Neuman (2011, p. 513) refers to as axial coding, the researcher focuses more on ‘causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes’ and looks for categories and codes that cluster together. I agree with Green et al. (2007, p. 549) that ‘a theme is more than a category’ and that ‘the generation of themes requires moving beyond a description of a range of categories’. Therefore, I reflected on how the categories and codes could be sorted and combined in order to identify preliminary (overarching) themes which provided a solid explanation and interpretation of the research issues (Creswell 2009).

**Step Five: reviewing, refining and relating themes to interpret the data**

In Step Four I identified major themes and provided textual evidence to support the conclusions. Step Five, the process of selective coding, required re-reading of the entire data set involving another but deeper analysis of the data to identify coherent patterns, differences between groups, comparisons and contrast (Braun & Clarke 2006; Neuman 2011). The process of coding and recoding and collating was repeated until further refinement did not add anything substantial to the different themes or the overall story told by the data, and when I was confident that no themes had been overlooked (Matthews & Ross 2010). The thematic analysis of the qualitative data was complete when the findings and interpretations provided a comprehensive understanding in concurrence with the research aim and objectives (Braun & Clarke 2006; Matthews & Ross 2010).

**Step Six: representing and visualising the data**

The final step was to present the interview findings in the form of text and interview quotes and also visually, in the form of tables and figures when appropriate. I decided to quantify a limited amount of the interview data to give a better visual presentation
to facilitate comparisons of the qualitative with the quantitative findings, aiding with triangulation of the results (Bryman 2004). As Bazeley (2002, p. 2) suggests in regards to data presentation:

If one uses numbers, interpretation is still involved. If one’s data are texts, counting may still be appropriate. Variables do not necessarily have clear-cut meanings: processes can be revealed through numeric analysis as well as through narratives, and so on.

A number of techniques were applied to evaluate and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative research. These are described in detail in Section 4.5. As mentioned above, building on the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview data, a quantitative survey was developed. This process is presented in the next section.

### 4.4 Quantitative research

This study followed a sequential design, in which the research project started with a series of qualitative interview, as the dominant approach (Stage 2). Building on the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview data, this process was followed by a quantitative, online survey (Stage Three). The approach in the quantitative stage was confirmatory rather than exploratory. A self-completed online survey, distributed and facilitated via Qualtrics Software, was selected as the appropriate data collection technique. The survey questionnaire was developed in order to triangulate and extrapolate key findings from the qualitative data to a broader European student population.

#### 4.4.1 Development and content of the online survey

The construction and formulation of a survey questionnaire requires caution to ensure that questions are related to the underlying research objectives (Neuman 2011). After another review of the objectives driving this research, a series of predetermined and structured questions for the survey questionnaire were
developed. The questionnaire included demographic questions and attitudinal items, and utilised mostly closed questions which required the survey respondents to select nominal or ordinal categorical variables. The scale used for the attitudinal items was a five-point Likert scale. The survey was structured into three sections with questions related to:

- demographic characteristics
- a variety of factors which may have been influential in European students’ decisions to select their host country and institution
- questions related to the importance of travel opportunities and experiences in Australia.

The survey also contained five open-ended questions with space for students to explain study abroad benefits, their overall Australian experiences and other issues if they were willing to answer them and had the time to do so.

4.4.1.1 Pilot test and amendments to instrument

A pilot test was undertaken prior to the formal survey data collection to obtain feedback, improve wording and sequencing, and to ensure that the questions were clear, understandable, and not too broad for the survey respondents (Bryman 2004). First, the content of the survey was discussed with my supervisors and advice was taken into account. Second, the survey layout and the structure of questions were discussed with the research methodologist at SCU and two academics within the School of Business and Tourism at SCU who had extensive knowledge on quantitative data collection. Third, a pilot version of the survey, distributed via Qualtrics Software, was used on a small number of ten respondents between May and June 2012. Students participating in the pilot study included six international students studying at SCU at the time, and two friends of the researcher who were not involved in international education – all were non-native English speakers with good English skills. Two casual university lecturers who were native English speakers also
participated in the pilot test. All respondents in the pilot study discussed their experience of the survey and it was identified that the survey had too many questions. As a result of all above procedure, three questions were removed and some amendments in wording were made to the survey. A copy of the final survey questionnaire is attached in Appendix 6.

4.4.2 Sample selection and population of survey respondents

As the student population for the survey was the same as it was for the interviews, I also utilised a non-probability, judgemental sampling strategy based upon the congruency between interview participants and survey respondents (Kumar 2011). I contacted the same educational agencies that were contacted in the interview recruitment stage in order to invite students to participate in the survey. Additionally, I approached staff working in the international office of Australian universities whom I had met at conferences. Twelve universities agreed finally to send out an invitation email to their former temporary study abroad students from European countries.

The population of the quantitative data collection included European tertiary students who were enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate program at their European home institution and had recently finished a one- or two-semester study abroad program in Australia. Only one agency and three Australian universities provided information about the number of these European students to whom they emailed my survey invitation. These organisations sent the survey to around 3000 European students, but the numbers who received the invitation email from other organisations is unknown. Therefore, I am unable to specify a correct total number of students who received an invitation email for the survey.

4.4.3 Data diagnostics

The next two sections contain a description of the analytical procedures used to process the raw data collected in the online survey. Descriptive analytical procedures
were applied to the results generated from the survey questionnaire, and descriptive accounts were calculated for the survey data for frequency distribution, percentages, item mean scores and standard deviations (Veal 2006). Frequencies and percentages, and mean scores and standard deviations, were calculated for the items in the survey and are used to present the results in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. For the survey questions that sought to identify which items influenced the decision-making of survey respondents, the mean scores of each item were ranked from highest to lowest. The items with higher means were considered more important in the decision-making processes of European students.

**Data cleaning**

Before exporting the raw data from Qualtrics, it was evident that 36 of the 230 students who responded to the survey request failed to answer over 80% of the questions. These 36 incomplete surveys were deleted prior to conducting any analysis. After exporting the raw data to SPSS, a software package used for statistical analysis, data were additionally screened for data entry errors and exclusion violations using visual analysis of the data file and frequency statistics (Veal 2006). The present study had a usable sample size of 194.

**Missing values in data**

Missing values occurred in the data analysis as a small number of survey respondents did not respond to certain questions (Allison 2001). The missing data were visually assessed and this revealed that the missing values were randomly distributed across all observations, and were therefore missing completely at random. Hair, Black and Babin (2010) provided a suggested threshold for including items with missing values in analysis. They recommend that each item has at least a 90% response rate, and that no discernible pattern can be recognised in the missing items. A missing value analysis was applied to the data. No item had more than 4.6% missing data, and no discernible pattern could be perceived in the unanswered items. As the conditions of Hair, Black and Babin (2010) were met, the mean was used to replace the missing values. This meant that the total number of respondents was 194.
Common method bias

Common method bias is one of the main sources of measurement error and it can have potentially serious effects on research findings, thus the data was checked for common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Podsakoff and colleagues (2003, p. 882) provide a summary of over 20 potential sources of common method bias. Common method bias can occur when survey respondents do not engage with the stimulus items, but instead respond in set patterns such as giving the same response for every items. This can lead to measurements errors. An accepted method for testing for the amount of common method bias in survey data is the Harman’s single-factor test. This test loads all of the variables onto one factor in an un-rotated factor analysis, thereby identifying the degree of variance for a single factor. If the variance is high (above 50% for example), it is an indication that there is a high chance that common method bias is present in the data (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In the survey data for this study, the variances indicated a very low chance of common method bias. As the data proved acceptable after missing value analysis and common bias tests, descriptive analysis was utilised to draw out meaningful patterns across the data.

4.4.4 Analysis of between-group differences

As will be discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, results from the qualitative (interview) data collection seemed to indicate that those students who participated in a study abroad program in Australia as exchange students appeared to have different experiences in comparison to those who were free-movers. Therefore, an analysis of the ways these two groups respond to a range of dependent variables was conducted to assess whether significant differences could be noted across a larger sample.

In quantitative analysis, examination of between-group differences in response patterns can be conducted in several ways depending on the nature of the data. Analysis of responses by dichotomous (only two) groups is usually conducted using an independent samples t-test, which examines whether there is a significant difference between two sets of mean scores (Coakes & Steed 2009). However, independent samples t-test require that data be normally distributed. If the normality
of items is violated, data must be analysed utilising non-parametric analysis techniques.

To examine the normality of the depend variables listed below, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality was applied to the questions pertaining to:

1) How survey respondents participated in their study abroad program.

2) How many months before arriving in Australia they applied for a SA semester.

3) How much information they had before applying to study in Australia.

4) The information sources they used to decide to study and select a university in Australia.

5) The factors influencing their decision to study abroad in Australia and to select a university in Australia.

6) The environmental factors influencing their decisions.

7) The factors considered important in their decisions to study in Australia.

However, all of the response items were shown to have non-normal distribution which is common in single-item survey data (Field, A 2013). Given these non-normal distributions, a Mann-Whitney-U-Test was used to examine whether the mean scores of the two groups on the above dependent variables were significantly different (equivalent to a t-test for parametric data).

The Mann-Whitney U test indicates a Pearson correlation score of below.05 to represent a significant difference between groups, and a Z-score to indicate the extent of difference. The complete results of this test are provided in the Appendix 7. Possible explanations of between-group differences are discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 with synthesis from the qualitative results.
4.5 Trustworthiness, reliability and validity

A variety of characteristics and indicators of good quality in qualitative and quantitative research are utilised by several researchers (e.g. (Braun & Clarke 2006; Bryman 2004; Creswell 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). To evaluate the rigour of the analysis process and the accuracy of findings, positivist researchers attempt to undertake quantitative inquiries which rely on measures such as validity and reliability (Johnson & Christensen 2012; Neuman 2011). Qualitative researchers are also concerned with validity. However, as interpretive research aims to understand the experiences and feelings of the research participants, interpretive researchers prefer to evaluate the ‘trustworthiness’, and ‘authenticity’ of research. This involves evaluating the research based on criteria such as credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Bryman 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Patton 2002; Ridenour & Newman 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) relate credibility closely to the positivist concept of internal validity; dependability to reliability; the term transferability to a form of external validity, and confirmability to the issue of presentation. These criteria are often used to judge the quality and accuracy of qualitative research procedures and findings (Kumar 2011).

The trustworthiness of a study is defined in terms of how a researcher employs clear arguments and criteria to persuade an audience that the researcher’s interpretation of the raw data is a truthful reflection of reality and is worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba 1985). If a study is trustworthy, the researcher has faithfully represented what the research participants presented during the qualitative data collection (Hewitt-Taylor 2011).

The term ‘authenticity’ indicates that a qualitative study captures the authentic meaning of the phenomenon under investigation from the viewpoint of the research participants (Bryman 2004, p. 276). Similarly, credibility attempts to capture ‘whether there is a consistency between the research participants’ views and the researcher’s representation of these’ (Hewitt-Taylor 2011, p. 74). A number of methods exist to enhance the credibility of qualitative research and to establish ‘trustworthiness’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘transparency’. These include prolonged engagement, persistent
observation, triangulation, peer briefing, member checks, negative case analysis, and thick descriptive data (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The different techniques which have been applied in this study in either the qualitative or quantitative are outlined below.

**Prolonged engagement in qualitative research**
I conducted two interviews which each participant. The interviews were on average 45 minutes long – in total almost 40 hours of audiotaped interview material were collected. During the second interviews I referred back to some of the interviewees’ comments from the first interviews. For example, in the second interview, participants were asked if the expectations they expressed in the first interview about their upcoming Australian sojourn had been fulfilled. Doing this increased credibility because I was able to check if the representation of interviewees’ opinions in the first interview were reflected by the researcher in an appropriate way.

**Member checks in qualitative research**
Member checking involves the researcher verifying their interpretation of the data with the participants from whom the original data was obtained (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Member checks with interview participants were completed. First, during the second interviews questions were related to the comments from the students in the first interview. After the second interviews, participants were asked if they were interested in receiving the full interview transcripts. I intended to respect participants’ privacy and the fact that they might not be interested in reading their interview transcripts at a later stage. Of the 29 interviewees, 15 asked to receive the full transcripts of both interviews. These students were invited to give feedback and make further comments on the summarised results.

**Thick descriptive data in qualitative research**
In the analysis and discussion chapters of this study I provide portions of the raw interview data by presenting quotes from the interviews. This procedure not only supports the development of the themes and conclusions but also allows the reader to comprehend the process of analysis (Bryman 2004).
Clear conceptualisation of the quantitative survey
The questionnaire for the online survey was carefully constructed to avoid ‘double-barrelled’ measures (Creswell 2009).

Peer debriefing in qualitative and quantitative research
Peer debriefing took the form of oral discussions with the researcher’s three PhD supervisors. Further, a discussion and cross-checking with two fellow PhD students from the same school helped me to clarify findings and interpretations, and to refine the explanations and justifications of the qualitative and quantitative methods that were applied (Bryman 2004).

Pilot studies/pre-tests in qualitative and quantitative research
Pilot studies were undertaken for the pre- and post-SA interviews and the survey to obtain feedback in order to improve the effectiveness of the data collection, and to aid in the elimination of ambiguity and the improvement of wording to further enhance reliability and validity (Neuman 2011). The procedures of the pilot test for the interviews and survey questionnaires were described in Sections 4.3.3 and 4.4.1, respectively.

Transparency of the qualitative and quantitative research
I offer transparency by fully and clearly describing and explaining each stage in the data collection and analysis process of the qualitative and quantitative research in this study (Bryman 2004).

Triangulation in qualitative and quantitative research
To ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the study, the technique of triangulation was applied. Triangulation is a method where different sources of information are examined to enhance the richness and rigour of a study and to expand the justification for themes (Creswell 2009; Lincoln & Guba 1985). In this study, three types of triangulation were employed:

1) Data triangulation – interview data was collected from interviewees from nine European countries studying in 15 Australian universities, and survey data was collected from students from 15 European countries studying in 20
different Australian universities. Interview data was collected at two different times.

2) Theory triangulation – two theories have been embedded to interpret the data in a single study.

3) Methodological triangulation – two different data gathering methods have been applied in this study, qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys.

4.6 Ethical considerations

To ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner, an application for ethical clearance was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at SCU, which adheres to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007). The form ‘Research conducted overseas’ was included in the ethics application as research in countries outside Australia was carried out. Ethical clearance for this research was granted on 26 April 2011 (Qualitative interviews: Approval number ECN-11-071). A change of protocol form relating to the research outline for conducting an online survey was approved on 4 May 2012 (Quantitative survey: Approval number ECN-12-093). The initial ethics approval was renewed each year by the HREC in line with standard procedure. In addition, the following steps were taken to promote adherence ethical standards:

Harm to participants
All research involving human participants carries potential risks for the participants (Bryman 2004; Johnson & Christensen 2012). The risk to participants in this research was considered negligible, meaning a) there was no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort; or b) that any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007). The potential inconvenience for the participants included giving up their time, and the effort involved in participating in the interviews or completing a survey. To minimise any potential inconvenience for participants each interview was carried out at a time and place convenient to the participant. Participants and survey respondents were also reminded of their right to
withdraw from the study without repercussion. No persons under the age of 18 were involved in the research.

**Informed consent**

Asking for informed consent allows participants to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in the study (Boudah 2011). Prior to the interviews, every potential participant received an information sheet and informed consent form via email (refer to Appendix 8). An information sheet for the online survey was provided on the first page of the questionnaire. The documents were sent to tell the interviewees and survey respondents what the study was about and that participation is completely free and voluntary, and to explain the ethical precautions undertaken. Interviews only took place once participants had read and fully understood all information, and had signed the consent form (see Appendix 9). Interviewees were told again that they were free to withdraw at any time and reminded that they could ask any questions before, during or after the interview.

**Data Confidentiality, anonymity and protection**

Confidentiality of data refers to control of access to information, and must be maintained in any research project so that the interview participants and survey respondents cannot be identified. Anonymity refers to the fact that the researcher does not know the identity of the survey respondents or at least cannot link the data with specific people (Krathwohl 2009). To protect the participants’ privacy and identity, all data in this research was de-identified. For example, pseudonyms have been used for interview participants. The recruitment for the survey respondents was an anonymous process in which the survey link was distributed via staff from agencies or universities. The anonymity of the survey respondents and their answers were protected through the settings on the Qualtrics survey homepage which ensured that the respondents could neither be tracked nor identified. Furthermore, all material and transcripts from the interviews and the survey were kept on a password-protected computer, and additionally in a locked filing cabinet.

Throughout this thesis and related publications, all identifying information has been removed and individual participants cannot be identified. All data are now stored at
the School of Business and Tourism at SCU where it is only accessible to myself as the researcher.

**Provision of feedback**

As described above, interview participants were asked if they were interested in receiving the full interview transcripts. In the cover letter for the survey it was explained that results of this study will be implemented in the research thesis and would be presented at conferences or published in peer-reviewed journal later on.

### 4.7 Methodological limitations

This research aims to understand the decision-making processes of Western European students and it is this focus that is one of the key contributions of this study. However, it is acknowledged that by including interviewees and survey respondents from only 16 European countries, limitations occurred. The three methodological limitations surrounding this research which are particularly important when considering its findings and implications of this research are:

1) Application to other international students: The results reported in this study are only applicable to European students who participate in temporary mobility programs in Australia as defined in Sections 4.3.3 and 4.4.2. Consequently, the results and implications of this research may not be applicable to other international student groups such as international students studying in Australia for a complete degree and students who come from countries other than those of the participants in this study.

2) Purposive sampling: The purposive sampling technique utilised in both research methods meant that the interviewees and survey respondents may not have been representative (Bryman 2004). In fact, the degree to which the results from this study are representative of the whole European student population temporarily studying in Australia is not known. Thus, the study is limited in the kinds of generalisations that can be made from it.
3) Non-response bias: For privacy reasons, agencies and universities were approached instead of contacting European international students directly. Therefore, it was not possible to calculate a traditional response rate in regards to the quantitative survey. Agencies and universities are very protective of their student customers as they often receive invitations from organisations and researchers in the field. Thus, the anonymous distribution process meant that the number of students who were approached for the survey, and the size of the overall population of European students temporarily studying at Australian universities, remain unknown.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has sought to explain and discuss the research strategies and processes adopted for this study. First, it explained why the interpretivist and post-positivist paradigms were deemed most appropriate for this study. This was followed by an explanation and justification for the mixed-methods research design that was used to explore and examine the decision-making processes of European tertiary students who chose to study in Australia. Further, a description and justification of the qualitative interviews and quantitative survey methods and procedures used in this research was provided. The key points of each research method adopted in this study after the initial of the literature review (Stage 1) are summarise in Table 9 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Qualitative method (Stage 2)</th>
<th>Quantitative method (Stage 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maturity of knowledge sought</td>
<td>Explore, describe and explain the decision-making processes of European students choosing to study in Australia</td>
<td>Further exploration Generalise and validate the findings from the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (pre – and post the students’ study semesters in Australia)</td>
<td>Online survey distributed via the Qualtrics website (after the study semester in Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size of participants</td>
<td>29 tertiary students from 10 European countries</td>
<td>194 tertiary students from 15 European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Thematic analysis using open, axial &amp; selective coding</td>
<td>Descriptive analysis Test of significance Correlations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary form of data</td>
<td>Words</td>
<td>Measures and numbers (words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition of the study components</td>
<td>Holistic (taken as a whole)</td>
<td>Disassembled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Adopts a personal, informal dialect Findings are reported as a narrative report</td>
<td>Adopts an impersonal, formal dialect Results are reported as derived facts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from (Krathwohl 2009, p. 30; Neuman 2011)*

The focus of the thesis now shifts to presenting, examining and discussing the results arising from the primary data collection phases in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.
5 Participants’ demographics and their information sources

“The decision-making process is complex, personal and nuanced, involving different types of information, messengers and influences over a long time.” (Roberts 2014, p. 3)

5.1 Introduction

Tertiary students have a wider range of choices for where to study abroad than ever before. It was highlighted in Section 3.2 that in order to be able to attract and successfully host European students, it is important for universities and stakeholders to understand not only how and why these students make their decisions but also what factors influence their perceptions of a study abroad destination. To date, relatively few studies have examined the decision-making processes of European students who choose to temporarily study outside of Europe, particularly in Australia. Moreover, few studies have examined temporarily mobile students’ decision-making from a holistic perspective. This study contributes to filling these gaps in the literature.

The purpose of the three empirical chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) is to present the findings of the current study and to address the research objectives outlined in Section 1.4. Each of the research questions is presented under its corresponding research objective. This chapter first examines the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Second, it examines the influences on European students’ decision-making processes when deciding to temporarily study in Australia (research objective one) by answering the following research questions:

- Which reference groups are most influential in these students’ decision-making?
• What are the information sources utilised by the students when selecting the study host country and institution?

This chapter first provides a summary of the demographic characteristics and the academic profiles of the 29 interviewees and the 194 survey respondents. The influence of reference groups, and the various information tools commonly utilised by students when selecting their study abroad destinations, are then discussed. The conceptual framework developed for this study suggests that information provided by reference groups and media sources can be relevant and influential in all decision-making stages to greater or lesser extents. Therefore, they are examined and discussed together in this chapter rather than explained in each stage of European students’ decision-making processes which are examined in the next chapter. The decision-making process starts when students first begin to search for general information about study abroad opportunities and it ends when they finally select a study destination and host university.

The 29 participants of the pre- and post-SA interviews are referred to as ‘interviewees’ while the 194 respondents to the quantitative survey are referred to as ‘survey respondents’. The data collection process in this study yielded a large amount of data. Results of the qualitative analysis (based on the interviews) and of the quantitative analysis (based on the survey) will be integrated under topics rather than presented separately. In order to maintain consistency, the results of the interviews are always presented first, followed by the results of the survey. A discussion of the results is provided at the end of each section. The survey data are used to support the interview findings and also to enable the identification of any differences between interviewees and survey respondents. Interviewees are labelled by numbers and their individual quotes carry these numbers. Further information on each interviewee can be found in Appendix 10.

For the purpose of comparison interview data are presented with percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Survey data are also presented with percentages or with means and standard deviations (SD).
5.2 Demographic characteristics and academic profile

This section provides an overview of the demographic characteristics and an academic profile of the interviewees and survey respondents. Demographic characteristics include the ages, genders, and nationalities of the members of both samples. Information about the academic profile of the students is related to their study degree program in their home country, and their study abroad program in Australia. The sources of financial support to pay for their tuition and living costs in Australia are also examined in this section.

It was emphasised in Section 2.1.4 that it is difficult to compare data among temporarily mobile students as many countries either partially or completely exclude students who participate in temporary mobility programs from their international statistics (Teichler 2012). Precise information on temporary student mobility not supported by ERASMUS, occurring outside of Europe, and information on self-organised overseas study by European students, is limited (Rivza & Teichler 2007; Waechter 2014; Woodfield 2010). Therefore, the existing data does not allow a clear distinction to be made between degree and temporarily mobile international students. As was discussed in Section 2.2, tertiary students studying temporarily in Australia on Working Holiday Visas or tourism visas are not included in the Australian data collection and therefore precise data on this group of international students in Australia is not available. This lack of specific data also makes it impossible to identify accurate demographic information on European students who study temporarily in Australia. At present, the only systematically collected demographic data about temporarily mobile students have been collected through EU-sponsored programmes such as ERASMUS and from the US from the ‘Open Doors Data 2012/2013’. Therefore, the demographic characteristics of the students in this study are only compared with the demographic data provided in those reports.

5.2.1 Age, gender and nationality

The personal demographic characteristics of the interview and survey sample are summarised in Table 10 below. Both qualitative and quantitative samples provide a
reasonable representation of the European international student population. The table shows the gender and age group distributions of the two samples. European nationalities are grouped into Northern, Western and Southern Europeans.

Table 10: Demographics characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interview sample % (N=29)</th>
<th>Survey sample % (N=194)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-43</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home country group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern European</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western European</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern European</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 10 above, most interviewees and survey respondents were female, fell within the 20–25 age bracket and came from Northern and Western European countries. At the time of the pre-SA interview over 60% of the interviewees were between 20 and 22 years old. Two students were 20, seven were 21, and nine were 22 years old. The other interviewees were between 23 and 26 years of age. Most survey respondents (67%) were between 23 and 27 when they participated in the survey. Around a quarter of the respondents were between 19 and 22 years old. In the group of survey respondents aged between 28 and 43 years, eight respondents were in their early thirties but only one student was over 32 years old. It must be acknowledged here that interviewees were asked about their age prior to the start of their study abroad semester, whereas survey respondents were asked a considerable time after they had finished their study program in Australia. This explains why the average age of the survey sample is slightly higher than the interview sample.

The home countries of interviewees and survey respondents were dominated by students from Western European countries including Germany, France, The Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland. Within this group over 50% of interviewees
Participants’ demographics and their information sources

and survey respondents were from Germany. In the Northern European group most interviewees and survey respondents were from Scandinavian countries including Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In the Southern European group most students came from Italy and Spain. A detailed list of the home countries of interviewees and survey participants is attached in Appendix 11.

5.2.2 Academic profile of students in home country

The data related to the academic/university characteristics of interviewees and survey respondents in their home countries are summarised in Table 11 below. Most interviewees were enrolled in a bachelor’s program (83%) and only 17% of interviewees were enrolled in a master’s program at their home university when they commenced their study semester in Australia. Almost all interviewees had been enrolled for at least two years in their bachelor’s program or for at least one year in their master’s degree program. Most interviewees (66%) were enrolled in an applied science program, and were mostly studying in the areas of business or event management. The other interviewees were enrolled in the arts, humanities and social sciences, with almost all studying in the areas of culture, linguistics or communication.

Table 11: Academic profile of students in home country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Interview sample % (N=29)</th>
<th>Survey sample % (N=194)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to two</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four or more (or unspecified)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study fields</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Sciences</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal &amp; Natural Sciences</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others, unspecified</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the survey sample, 47% of students were enrolled in a bachelor’s program and 53% in a master’s program and most survey respondents were in their third year of
university study. However, it is difficult to compare the interview and survey groups in regards to academic characteristics. It was not possible to capture a precise picture of the survey respondents as they were asked post-study abroad to state the year and degree program they were currently enrolled in at home. I sought to invite the students to participate in the survey directly after they finished their study program in Australia. However, the nature of the data I received was out of my control. For example, some Australian universities and agencies had distributed the survey request to all of their former European abroad students who had studied at their university in the last 12 months. Therefore, there is a lack of certainty in the data collected regarding degree program and study year in the survey sample. It can only be assumed that survey respondents who reported they were in their first year of their master’s program were actually still enrolled in a bachelor’s program when studying in Australia.

Furthermore, some students were studying in tertiary programs which do not fit exactly into the category of a bachelor’s or master’s program such as the German ‘Staatsexamen’, a post graduate level degree program for students who are studying in the areas of law, medicine and education. These survey respondents were counted in the master’s degree category and this may explain why the percentage of respondents studying in year four or above is higher than in the interview group. However, though noteworthy, this is not a major consideration in this study as the aim is not to explore commonalities or differences among the factors identified as affecting European students’ decision-making with respect to their degree programs or year of study.

With regards to the other academic characteristics, the survey sample is comparable to the interview sample. Around a third of the survey respondents studied in arts, humanities and social sciences while over half studied in applied science.

For over three-quarters of interviewees (76%) and survey respondents (82%), studying abroad was not a compulsory part of their degree programs at home. This implies that less than a quarter of interviewees (24%) and respondents (18%) were required to study abroad as a compulsory part of their home university curriculum.
As shown in Table 12 above, almost all interviewees acknowledged that their home university had exchange programs in their study degree program worldwide and over two-thirds of all interviewees (69%) and survey respondents (68%) were aware of the fact that their home university maintained an exchange program with one or more Australian university.

### 5.2.3 Academic profile of students in host country

As shown in Table 13 below, the numbers of interviewees and survey respondents participating in their study programs in Australia as free-movers were slightly higher than the numbers of students participating in exchange programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student status</th>
<th>Interview sample</th>
<th>Survey sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (N=29)</td>
<td>% (N=194)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange student</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free-mover</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For almost all interviewees (93%) and most survey respondents (85%) the duration of their study abroad program was less than six months.

Although it was expected that most interviewees and survey respondents would state that Australia had been their first choice of study abroad destination, this was not the case for all students. Some interviewees (17%) and survey respondents (14%) stated that Australia was not their first choice of study abroad destination. It is apparent from Table 14 below that most of these students would have preferred to study abroad in the US.
Table 14: First choice of study abroad destination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of 1st choice</th>
<th>Interview sample % (N=29)</th>
<th>Survey sample % (N=194)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For those students for whom Australia was not the first choice of study abroad destination, the most frequently preferred study destinations were the US, Canada and New Zealand. Other preferred destinations were Dubai, Finland, Japan, Russia, Scotland, Singapore and Taiwan. The majority of these students reported that they were either not successful in their application to obtain an exchange place in their preferred country, or received a better exchange offer in Australia. Others did not find a suitable program in their first choice country. Some of these students found the application process was too complicated in the US or too slow in New Zealand, or that the semester time was not compatible with their home degrees. An enhanced cooperation between home and host university, or an offer of a scholarship were the reasons why two students chose Australia as their study destination instead of New Zealand or the US. These findings demonstrate the importance of the application process in contributing to a positive student experience. Institutions and agencies need to ensure that this process runs efficiently for students.

The distribution of Australian states where students participated in their study abroad program is shown in Table 15 below.

Table 15: States and number of host universities where students were studying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State in Australia (Number of universities)</th>
<th>Interview sample % (N=24)</th>
<th>Survey sample % (N=194)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales (7)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland (7)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria (6)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania (1)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia (3)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most interviewees and survey respondents studied in New South Wales (NSW), followed by Queensland (QLD) and Victoria (VIC). A small number of students studied in Tasmania, South Australia, and only one studied in Western Australia. Of the 25 Australian institutions where the students studied, most were located in the largest city of each state Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Adelaide. However, around a third of the interviewees and a quarter of the survey respondents studied at a university or a campus located in smaller cities, for example, in Cairns, Townsville, Lismore, Newcastle and the Gold Coast. Previous studies have been criticised for focusing on students on just one or a few locations. That the participants in this current research studied at 25 of the 40 Australian universities is a very good distribution and overcomes potential criticism that the institutional focus was too narrow.

**Visa choice of European students**

While I had initially assumed that all European interviewees would study on a student visa in Australia, it emerged during the interviews that some studied under the WHV category. This is possible as applicants for a WHV can study up to four months in Australia. Students who chose a WHV argued that it was not only cheaper but also easier to apply for a WHV. In addition, it gave them the opportunity to travel and work in Australia for up to a year after they finished studying. Based on these findings from the pre-SA interviews, I decided to include a question in the survey to ascertain how many respondents actually studied on a WHV instead of a study visa. The majority of the 194 survey respondents (94%) studied on a student visa while 6% selected a WHV. Eleven per cent of all survey respondents on student visas applied later for a tourist visa in order to extend their stay in Australia after their semester was finished.

**5.2.4 Sources of financial support**

It is apparent from Table 16 below that interviewees and survey respondents obtained financial support from different sources to finance their study and living costs for their semester(s) in Australia. Among the interviewees none of the students
had to personally pay their study fees in Australia. Out of the 29 interviewees only two (7%) did not receive any study fee support from their home university or government. Instead, their parents supported them as they were both studying at a private university at home. For students studying under exchange programs, their home university covered their study fees in Australia. The other interviewees (52%) received financial support from their home government which fully or partly covered their study fees in Australia. One interviewee stated that while the main study costs were covered by her home government, she received minimal additional study fee support from her host university in Australia. In regards to living costs, only a few interviewees (10%) received support from their home government while the majority self-funded living and travel expenses and received additional financial support from their families.

Table 16: Financial support received by students for study and living costs in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of support</th>
<th>Interview sample % (N=29)</th>
<th>Survey sample % (N=194)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study fees</td>
<td>Living costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from family</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funded</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from home government or university</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from host university in Australia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the interviewees, the students in the survey group also obtained financial support from a range of sources to pay their study and living costs in Australia. Furthermore, most students also received support from their home government or university to finance their study fees in Australia whereas only 6% of the survey respondents received support from their host university in Australia. Over a third of respondents received study fee support from their families while 21% paid their own study fees. However, it is not known whether the financial support received by the survey respondents fully covered their study and living costs in Australia. Most interviewees and survey respondents stated that costs for leisure and travel activities in Australia were paid for mainly by themselves and partly by their parents. The
findings of this study regarding financial support are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

5.2.5 Discussion relating to students’ demographic characteristics and academic profile

The demographic characteristics and academic profile of the participants who took part in this current study are consistent with those of other temporary study abroad students in previous studies. Most students in this study were female and fell within the 20–25 age bracket. Other research findings suggesting that European students participating in ERASMUS programs in 2009–2010 were predominantly female (61%), on average 22.6 years old and studying for a bachelor’s degree (69%) (European Commission 2011). It was also found in another study of over 12,000 ERASMUS students studying in six European countries that most students were under 25 and female (Vossensteyn et al. 2010). Similarly, it was found that 65% of the US students who studied abroad in 2012/2013 were female (IIE 2014). The higher percentage of interviewees and survey respondents coming from Northern and Western European countries reflects the commonly accepted view that students from those countries are more mobile than those from Southern European countries (Heublein et al. 2011; Krzaklewsk & Krupnik 2006). The higher percentage of German students in this study also reflects that the majority of the European students participating in temporary mobility programs in Australia in 2014 came from Germany (see Section 2.4.4).

The academic profile related to European students’ degree programs and study fields in their home countries are consistent with other temporary study abroad students. For example, in 2009–2010, 69% of all European international students who participated in a temporary mobility program (ERASMUS programs) were enrolled in a bachelor’s program (European Commission 2011), and the majority of ERASMUS students were enrolled in the fields of economics and the social sciences (Vossensteyn et al. 2010). Similarly, 42% of US students who temporarily studied abroad in 2012–2013 were enrolled in the fields of business management and the social sciences (IIE 2014).
It was found that to study abroad was not a compulsory part of most European students’ degree programs at home. The number of students studying as free-movers in their study programs in Australia was slightly higher than the number of students participating in exchange programs. This is an unexpected finding of my study, as most of the interviewees’ (69%) and survey respondents’ (68%) home universities had exchange programs with Australian universities. This finding is also in contrast with previous studies which found that most European temporarily mobile students participated in the ERASMUS and other mobility programs as exchange students and not as free-movers (European Commission 2012). For most interviewees (93%) and survey respondents (85%) the duration of their study abroad program was less than six months, and they participated in one-semester abroad programs. These findings are similar to previous studies which suggest that most European students participate for up to six months in temporary mobility programs (European Commission 2012). However, this is different to temporarily mobile students from the US where the majority (60%) participate in short-term mobile programs which are under eight weeks compared to 37% who studied for over eight weeks until up to one semester and only a minority (3%) studied for a whole academic year abroad (IIE 2014). These findings reinforce the contention that students who come from European countries where a common and comparable degree credit system and curriculum has been established, have similar preferences and behaviours when temporarily studying abroad. This is in contrast to students who come from outside of Europe and participate in temporary study programs.

Most European students studied at Australian institutions in New South Wales, followed by Queensland and Victoria. The institutions were often located in the largest city of each state. These results are similar to the data for the general population of tertiary international students in Australia who mainly choose study destination in the largest cities (AEN 2015).
5.3 Information sources for study abroad

In order for higher education institutions to identify opportunities for marketing and for attracting international students it is important firstly to understand which information sources influence students’ decision-making processes and secondly, to understand what role these sources play in this marketing process. Overall, most prospective international students do not have previous knowledge or experience of study abroad destinations or institutions. Therefore, it is essential that they can access information about specific host countries and institutions. It was of interest in this study to see if there were common patterns with regards to the sources of information that European students utilised and trusted most when deciding if Australia was the right study abroad destination for them.

As outlined in Section 3.4, Gadomski (2006) pointed out that the decision-making process begins when a choice is needed and no preconceived experiences and solutions exist. Gadomski (2006) suggests that the individual decision-maker employs sources of information, personal preferences, and knowledge in order to reach a decision. In the context of international students these three sources are: a) information provided from outside the students’ existing knowledge such as from resource groups and media sources which allow students to learn about a study destination, b) existing knowledge students’ may have about a study destination, and c) their individual preferences (feelings) towards a certain study abroad destination. Influenced by the CDM theory’s focus on the individual process of the decision-maker, in my view, the various motivations of students to study abroad should also be considered to be a major factor in the decision to study abroad. Thus, these motivations have been included as the fourth source in the conceptual framework (see Section 3.5).

European students’ motivations, their existing knowledge, and their personal preferences are identified and discussed in Chapter 6 while the sources of information students utilised in their decision-making are identified and discussed in this chapter. The incorporation of the information and recommendations which students utilised in their decision-making ties in well with the CDM theory’s focus on
the individual context of European students’ decision-making processes when studying abroad. The conceptual framework was designed to capture these sources of information, as well as students’ knowledge, motivations and individual preferences at all decision-making stages. These stages include: the moment when they first consider studying abroad, their search, review and evaluation of their knowledge about study abroad opportunities, and their final decision on where to study.

As already explained in detail in Section 3.3.4, information provided by different sources can influence students not only in the beginning of their general decision-making but also in their selection of host country and institution. These sources of information can be organised into the following categories:

1. Information and recommendations received from reference groups:
   a) family, friends and social networks (alumni, peer students)
   b) internal academic advisers (at students’ home university)
   c) external academic advisers (outside students’ home university).

2. Information received from the media sources:
   a) internet (e.g. blogs, private and commercial educational websites)
   b) other media sources (e.g. print media, TV, radio).

In this section, information provided by reference groups and received from different media sources influential in European students’ decision-making are examined. It should be acknowledged that these information sources were apparent and interconnected during all stages of students’ decision-making. Nonetheless, it was found that some information sources were more prominent than others depending on the stage of decision-making.
5.3.1 Information provided by reference groups

Interviewees reflected in the pre-SA interview on which people were influential in their decision to study abroad in general and in particular to select Australia as their study destination. Interestingly, over half of the interviewees described the early decision to go abroad as their own idea and said it was not related to the influences of reference groups such as relatives and friends. Instead, these interviewees often stated that they had ‘always wanted to go abroad’. This suggests that the decision to study abroad is very much an individual decision for many students.

All interviewees stated that they received general information about study opportunities abroad from internal academic advisers at their home university at the beginning of their university studies. This information was generally provided by the international office at the student’s home institution through seminars, information days and through the institution’s website and sometimes via brochures, flyers, or notice boards placed around the institution. Interviewees commented that the information given by the international office provided them with information about the best time in their degree program to go abroad, where they could find further information about going abroad, and also the financial support options were provided for students while studying abroad.

Compared to the interviewees’ general decisions to study abroad, the picture was slightly different regarding how influential reference groups were in their decisions to select Australia as their study destination. From Figure 17 below it is apparent that 66% of interviewees stated that the recommendations and information received from people in their social networks and/or family members, who had already studied abroad or travelled in Australia, significantly influenced their decision. For example, one student said: “Both my sister for a year and my best friend for six months have been in Australia. The pictures and information I got from them was the trigger for my decision to study in Australia” (09). Another student said she was influenced by “my uncle who studied in Australia but as well the support of my parents and my fellow students influenced my decision and assured me to study abroad in Australia” (01).
Several interviewees mentioned that their friends and fellow students had a strong influence on their decision to select Australia. For example, one said: “I never went outside of Europe and yes, I wanted to go somewhere outside. And yeah I know many people that went to Australia and everybody told me how wonderful it is and talked about Australia, so I had already a good opinion about Australia. So, when I had to choose where to go I thought yeah cool, Australia could be nice” (2). Similarly, another interviewee pointed out: “me and my friends we did the [exchange program] application together and everyone was like ‘oh cool let’s go to the other side of the world’, I mean all my friends were keen to go so far away” (24). Another interviewee had been in Australia before and said that “my friends in Australia were pulling me to come back” (25).

Parents played more a supportive role from a financial perspective, rather than a strong influential role in students’ decision to study in Australia. For example, one interviewee explained that “My parents were influential in my decision to study in Australia in the way that they agreed to pay for my study abroad sojourn” (5). She further said that without their financial support she could not have done it and probably would have selected a study abroad destination in Europe. Another interviewee said: “It was totally my own decision to study abroad particularly in Australia, however, if my parents would not have financially supported my decision, I
could not have done it” (16). Thus, the financial support of students’ parents can also act as a facilitating factor in students’ decisions to study abroad.

On the other hand, around a third of the interviewees (31%) stated that they just followed their own inspirations and they believed that they were not strongly influenced by other people in their decision to choose Australia. One interviewee reflected on her decision and said: “I was in Australia as an au pair before, so I knew the country. It was totally my own decision to study in Australia and everyone was quite surprised that I wanted to go to Australia again” (12). However, even among those students who asserted that it was their own decision it seemed that most of them still received support and assurance from friends and family that it was the right decision to select Australia. For example, one interviewee reflected that “It was my own inspiration to study in Australia but friends who studied abroad in Australia before really helped and encouraged me that this was the right decision” (17).

Only a small number of interviewees (10%) stated that besides being influenced by family and/or friends, academic staff at their home university had had an additional influence in their selection of Australia. For example, one student said: “Obviously my professors from my home university who are in contact with some professors from SCU in Australia were one factor and then my mum obviously as well, she came here when she was my age, she studied English as well” (26).

Education agencies in students’ home countries appeared to have influenced only two interviewees (7%) in their selection of Australia. However, for these two female interviewees the advice of an agency was very important. One said that: “Australia was always under my favourite destinations for a study abroad semester but when I met the agency at an education fair at my university and they gave me all this information and I knew I would get help and support from them than I actually decided to go to Australia” (04). For the other interviewee an agency did not initially influence the selection of her study abroad destination as she had planned to study in Japan. However, three weeks prior to start of her semester in Japan the Fukushima nuclear accident happened. She “decided on her own to go to Australia instead” (14) but reflected that without the support of her parents and the help from an agency
she would not have been able to change her study abroad destination to Australia in less than three weeks.

As shown in Table 17 below, a similar picture appeared in the survey group in that the information utilised by respondents appeared to come from a mix of different sources. However, in the survey respondents’ decisions to select Australia as their study destination ‘family or friends who have been in Australia before’ was the most cited source (mean=2.58) followed by information provided by ‘agencies in student’s home country’ (mean=2.12). Information provided by academic advisers from the students’ home universities, by advisers at study abroad exhibitions and by academic advisers from Australian universities were the sources least utilised by survey respondents, with all attaining just a mean under 2. Nevertheless, it should be noted here that it is not known if the advisers who provided information to students at study abroad exhibitions were from an agency, an Australian university or another organisation.

Table 17: Information from reference groups utilised by survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Information used to decide to study in Australia</th>
<th>Information used to select Australian institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family or friends who have been in Australia before</td>
<td>2.58 ± 1.43</td>
<td>1.78 ± 1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies in students’ home country</td>
<td>2.12 ± 1.44</td>
<td>2.27 ± 1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Australian abroad students</td>
<td>2.08 ± 1.32</td>
<td>1.94 ± 1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisers at home university</td>
<td>1.88 ± 1.16</td>
<td>2.10 ± 1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions about study abroad</td>
<td>1.72 ± 1.08</td>
<td>1.60 ± 1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisers at host universities</td>
<td>1.43 ± .80</td>
<td>1.62 ± 1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1=‘Not at all’ to 5=‘Very often’

Information sources utilised when survey respondents selected their host institution were slightly different. Information provided by family and friends, and also fellow students who travelled or studied in Australia before were less important. Instead, information became slightly more important when provided by agencies and academic advisers at the student’s home university. However, means of just above 2 for these sources indicate that not many students used them.
Similar to the interview group, information provided by academic advisers from Australian universities or by advisers at study abroad exhibitions was not an important influence on survey respondents’ selection of their host institutions.

Four interviewees (14%) and 24% of the survey respondents who had travelled to Australia before applying to study abroad stated that their knowledge of Australia from their previous travel influenced their decision to study in Australia but was less influential in their selection of the host university.

5.3.1.1 Selection of host institution: Differences between exchange and free-mover students

As explained above, European students utilised more or less the same information sources provided by reference groups in their selection of Australia as they did for their selection of their host institution. In general, information provided by reference groups such as family and friends became less important and information from former Australian study abroad students and agencies slightly more important in their selection of their host institution. However, when selecting their host institution in Australia some differences were found between the free-mover students and the exchange students in both samples. This is not surprising as for exchange students the choice of host university (and therefore also the choice of the host city) is often predetermined by the availability of an exchange place. Free-mover students in the interview group described their search for information about a suitable host university and courses as quite time consuming, whereas many of the exchange students had no choice in the selection of their host university and therefore did not gather much information about Australian universities.

Although for the majority of exchange students in the interview group the host university was predetermined, some had a choice as their home university had exchange programs at a number of different Australian universities. Therefore, these exchange students either obtained advice and information from academic advisers at their home university, or searched Australian universities’ websites themselves to decide which university to select as their first choice.
In contrast, around half of the free-mover students in the interview group utilised the services of an agency in their home country at some stage in their choice of a host university, and also utilised other sources such as Australian university websites and reports from former study abroad students on their home universities’ websites. Almost all of these free-mover students stated that they would have found the process of applying for a semester in Australia and selecting the right university rather difficult without the help of their agency. One interviewee said: “I had enormous support from the agency and I do not think I could have done it without them” (1). Another interviewee stated: “I would say they [the agency] have been very important to me. Both, like helping me with stuff and also just feeling, I am not alone. Because in the beginning, as with everything else you are getting started with, you have no idea how to figure everything out” (10).

In the survey group, and as demonstrated in Table 18 below, a Mann-Whitney-U-Test indicated differences between free-movers and exchange students in that free-movers utilised more information provided by educational agencies when selecting Australia (mean=2.67) as a study destination than exchange students did (mean=1.41).

Table 18: Between group-differences, Survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item^</th>
<th>Z-score</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Mean Free-movers</th>
<th>Mean Exchange students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) To study abroad in Australia Education agencies for studying in Australia in my home country</td>
<td>-6.532</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) To select your Australian university Education agencies for studying in Australia in my home country</td>
<td>-7.651</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ^ Grouping Variable: How did you participate in your study abroad program in Australia? (Tick only one option, As an exchange student/As a free-mover)

However, this was the opposite in students’ selection of their host institution where a Mann-Whitney-U-Test and a differences in mean scores indicated that free-movers utilised fewer information sources provided by educational agencies than exchange students did.
5.3.2 The internet as an important information tool

Most interviewees utilised information about Australia on specific websites, and searching the websites of Australian universities became even more important for interviewees when selecting their host universities and courses.

Survey respondents reported the internet was the most popular information tool utilised when selecting Australia as their study destination, and also their host university. It can be seen from the Table 19 below that these students most often sought information regarding studying in Australia from websites which provided general information about study abroad and also from the websites of Australian universities.

Table 19: Information from media sources utilised by survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Information used to decide to study in Australia</th>
<th>Information used to select Australian institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean¹</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites about study abroad</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites of Australian universities</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs, Alumni networks</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print media</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1='Not at all' to 5='Very often'

On the other hand, information received from ‘blogs or alumni networks’, or ‘print media’ appeared to be a less important information sources in survey respondents’ processes of selecting Australia as their study destination, as both attained mean under 2. The picture was similar when survey respondents selected their host institutions. However, information received from the websites of Australian universities was considered more favourably with a mean of 3.35, whereas information from print media and blogs/alumni networks was even less important than in their selection of Australia as a study destination. It is acknowledged that the information from blogs and alumni networks is also created by “people”. However, because students do not interact in person with these anonymous individuals, they are not grouped under reference groups.
5.3.3 Discussion of knowledge sources influencing students decision-making

The findings of my research are in line with the findings of the literature reviewed in Section 3.4 indicating that many information sources are utilised and are influential in the decision-making processes of international students when considering studying abroad. In regards to the information sources from reference groups it was found through the analysis of the interview transcripts and the survey data that recommendations and information provided by reference groups from friends and peer students, and sometimes family members who had studied or travelled in Australia were most important in European students’ selection of Australia as their study destination. Other studies also emphasise the information provided by people from students’ social circles who have studied or travelled overseas. If they communicate positive images of a country and also tertiary institutions they can influence prospective students when they are selecting their study destination (Arambewela, Hall & Zuhair 2005; Bourke, 2000; Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003; Cairns & Smyth 2011; Carlson 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Smart & Ang 1992; Van Mol & Timmerman 2013). For example, Cairns and Smyth (2011) found that Northern Ireland students with mobility intentions are twice as likely to have friends that travelled and live overseas compared to students without mobility intentions. Binsardi (2003) confirmed that 52% of international students studying in the UK considered that the best promotion strategies are those based on students’ networks. Furthermore, Eder (2010) found that most temporarily mobile students at a university in the US relied on the experiences of their friends and of former study abroad students at their home universities to inform their decisions. This finding has also been confirmed among temporarily mobile students from Australia and New Zealand who also identified people who had studied abroad as the most influential factor in their choice of a study host country or institution (Chew & Croy 2011; Doyle et al. 2010).

Findings from other research on Asian students studying in Australia revealed that these students were particularly strongly influenced by their parents in choosing Australia as a study destination (Arambewela, Hall & Zuhair 2005; Eduworld 2001;
Son & Pearce 2005). This is different to findings of my study, where recommendations and information provided by friends and people in social networks who had previously studied abroad were more influential than parents. Reasons for these differences might relate to stronger family ties and loyalties among families from Asian and Middle Eastern countries. It may also relate to the fact that these parents usually finance overseas study costs for their children whereas most European students received financial support from their government or home university while studying abroad in Australia. In addition, it must be considered that the decision to study abroad for a whole degree program is more significant and involves substantially higher costs than a temporary study program.

It is concluded from the results of this study that the information and support provided by academic advisers at students’ home universities acted as an important facilitating factor in European students’ decision-making processes. However, information from academic advisers at students’ home universities was utilised more in making the general decision to study abroad than in students’ selection of Australia as a study destination. It has also been found in the literature that temporarily mobile students often based their decisions on recommendations and information of academic advisers at their home university (Chew & Croy 2011; Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010; Teichler 2004b). A study of ERASMUS students revealed that information supplied by former ERASMUS students and by academic staff either via social websites, blogs or personal communication seemed to be the most significant sources of knowledge about European mobility programs (Vossensteyn et al. 2010). Although information provided by educational agencies in European students’ home countries did not play a very important role in most cases these information sources became more important for free-mover students when selecting their host institution. Together with the above mentioned sources, these information tools acted as facilitating factors in European students’ decisions to temporarily study in Australia.

While temporarily mobile students are influenced by a variety of different sources, studies have also suggested that the internet is one the most often utilised mediums to obtain information about prospective host countries, cities and institutions (Eder,
Smith & Pitts 2010). The current study has also highlighted that most European students searched websites about study abroad programs in general and particularly websites of Australian universities before selecting their host university and courses in Australia. However, although most interviewees stated that they often utilised information about Australia from specific websites for practical purposes, such as researching potential destinations and finding out about courses, they did not consider this information source to be as important as friends and family were in their selection of a destination.

The presence of external academic advisers from Australian universities at designated educational information events or exhibitions and on campus visits at prospective international students’ home countries have been found to be an important source, particularly for Asian students wanting to obtain information about study opportunities in Australia (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012; AEI 2003; Harris 2002). This was also confirmed by a study of international students studying at universities in Victoria (Australia) which reported that information provided by education agencies and exhibitions was very influential in their decision to study in Australia (Michael, Armstrong & King 2003). In contrast, this was not confirmed by the findings of this current study as information provided by external academic advisers from Australian universities was not utilised by many European students. Furthermore, print media, advertisement about study abroad opportunities on TV and radio played no role at all in European students’ selections of their study abroad destinations.

It is acknowledged that all decisions have internal and external inputs from sources such as from friends, peer students and family members. However, in terms of decision-making theories, the decision-making processes of the students are described as individual processes. While the students are influenced to varying degrees by reference groups and a range of information sources, ultimately they made a cognitive decision based on what they, as individuals, perceived as sufficient information. It is essential, therefore, that students are provided with as much information as possible from multiple sources which can facilitate their process of decision-making in the best way possible.
5.4 Conclusion

This chapter addressed research objective one by examining the influence of information sources on European students’ decision to temporarily study abroad in Australia. The chapter first provided an overview of the demographic characteristics and the academic profile of the European students who participated in this study. It was identified that these demographic characteristics are similar to those participants in other studies focusing on European study abroad students.

The reference groups and media sources that were most commonly utilised and most influential in students’ searches and decisions about study abroad destinations were also examined and discussed. The most important information sources utilised by European students are summarised in Table 20 (see page 187).

It was found that information and support provided by internal academic advisers at students’ home institutions were influential in guiding and facilitating the general process of studying abroad. While this information source could be termed as an important push factor in students’ general decision to study abroad, I see them instead as being more of a facilitating factor. It was identified that the home universities were integral to the students’ early exposure to temporary study abroad opportunities, as early information from academic advisers and the availability of financial support presents an opportunity for attracting students to study abroad. Home and host universities should not underestimate the importance of providing comprehensive information and support for students who are interested in studying abroad. It is essential therefore that these information sources and support systems remain available to European students.

However, academic advisers from the students’ home institutions were not as influential in students’ decisions about where to study abroad or in selecting Australia as a study destination. It was revealed that recommendations and information, particularly from friends, peer students and family members who had previously studied or travelled in Australia, were the strongest influence.
Information provided by educational agencies, particularly about Australian universities, was the only relevant source of external academic advice utilised by students outside of their home university. European students also utilised websites to gather information about Australia as a study destination and also about suitable host institutions. Resources from print media were less relevant as an information source.

Through examining the recommendations and information sources, in particular from a cognitive decision-making perspective, this chapter has provided an understanding of which information sources were utilised most commonly and which sources influenced students most significantly throughout the different stages of their selection of a study abroad destination.

The next chapter will examine and discuss how the students’ individual motivations to study abroad, the existing knowledge some students have had about Australia, and their individual preferences for Australia influenced their decision-making. The influence of various country and institutional features of Australia and Australian institutions which most significantly pulled students to select Australia are also examined and discussed.
Table 20: Socio-cognitive factors influencing students’ decision-making to SA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-cognitive factors &amp; facilitating (push) factors in students’ home &amp; host countries</th>
<th>Predisposition Stage (Decision to temporary SA)</th>
<th>Destination Stage (Search &amp; selection of temporary SA destination)</th>
<th>Institutional Stage (Search &amp; selection of host institution)</th>
<th>Final Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information sources provided by reference groups and media sources</td>
<td>Family, friends &amp; social networks</td>
<td>Friends, family &amp; former SA students who previously travelled in Australia</td>
<td>Former SA students</td>
<td>\</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal academic advisers</td>
<td>Internal &amp; external academic advisers in home country</td>
<td>External advisers in home country (Agencies)</td>
<td>\</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Availability of exchange program</td>
<td>Availability of exchange program</td>
<td>\</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Print media</td>
<td>Websites about SA in Australia &amp; other destinations</td>
<td>Websites (Australian universities)</td>
<td>\</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>Desire for personal and professional growth including a desire to:</td>
<td>Desire for personal and professional growth achievable in Australia:</td>
<td>Specific SA-program offered</td>
<td>Compatible semester time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Travel opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be exposed to a new culture</td>
<td>A ‘Real’ SA experience, far from home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience a new lifestyle</td>
<td>A multi-cultural environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>An easy-going lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve linguistic skills</td>
<td>To live close to the beach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquire new academic skills</td>
<td>Warmer climate than at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA is compulsory in students’ degree program at home</td>
<td>English as the teaching language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A different academic experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Preferences</td>
<td>To assess future liveability outside of home country</td>
<td>To assess future liveability in Australia</td>
<td>Preference to live in a certain area/city</td>
<td>\</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Previous travel/educational experiences outside of home country</td>
<td>Desire to undertake educational travel again/to return to Australia</td>
<td>To return to a specific city in Australia</td>
<td>\</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Factors influencing key stages of decision-making

6.1 Introduction

This chapter further addresses research objective one, namely: to examine the influences and steps involved in European students’ decision-making when deciding to temporarily study in Australia, by addressing the research questions:

- What steps do students undertake in their decision-making processes?
- Which factors appear to be the most significant ones in students’ decisions to study in Australia?

This chapter also contributes to addressing research objective two: to examine the relationship between international education and tourism from the perspective of European students who are undertaking educational travel within Australia by answering the following research question:

- To what extent are the desires to travel and explore tourist attractions a motivator for students to choose Australia as their study destination?

In the four main sections of this chapter, the four stages of European students’ decision-making processes are examined and discussed. The first stage is the predisposition stage, in which students first consider studying overseas, when they are influenced by certain facilitating and ‘push’ factors. The second stage is selection of Australia as their temporary study destination. The third stage is the selection of a host institution. The last stage is the one in which students accept the offer to study at their selected host institution.

This chapter is structured in the same way as the previous chapter. The findings of the interviews and survey are presented first and a discussion of the results is provided at the end of each section.
As discussed previously, the push and pull theory and the CDM theory were selected for this research because together they address the range of contributing factors and influences in the decision-making of European international students. The decision-making of students is considered an individual process in which students assess the situation, identify the factors important to them and weigh up the alternatives before reaching the final decision to study in Australia, and then act upon it. Instead of only investigating push and pull factors relevant in the student’s home and host country the CDM theory was incorporated into the conceptual framework as it follows a socio-cognitive approach and views decision-making as a human mental process which presupposes intelligence on the part of the decision-maker, in this case, the student (Gadomski 2006).

6.2 Predisposition stage: Students’ decisions to temporarily study abroad

The predisposition stage begins when a student first considers undertaking a temporary mobility program as part of a degree program at their home university. This stage ends when a student makes the decision to participate in a temporary study mobility program and begins to search for study abroad opportunities.

6.2.1 Time line of the decision to study abroad

Drawing on the results of this study it was found that commonly, European students first made a decision to temporarily study abroad, without having a precise study destination in mind. As discussed in greater depth in in Section 5.3, over half of the interviewees described their decision to study abroad as their own idea and stated that they had ‘always wanted to go abroad’. Five of the 16 interviewees who responded in this way explained that they had intended to go abroad on a high school exchange program which eventually did not work out. For them, it was always clear that they would instead go abroad during their university studies. Another seven interviewees (24%) stated that their interest in studying abroad was first sparked by information given to them by academic advisers at their home university. Four
The picture was slightly different among survey respondents. Around 30% of them reported first considering the possibility either at high school or at the beginning of their university studies, while 37% reported they first considered the idea during their university study.

6.2.2 Motivations for studying abroad

Most interviewees described their decision to study abroad as a complex and time-consuming process and highlighted a variety of motivations that first pushed them into the general decision to study abroad and, at a later stage, pulled them into the decision to select Australia as their study destination.

It was apparent that the interviewees’ decisions to study abroad were initially triggered by a general desire to travel, to experience a new culture and lifestyle, and to enhance academic and linguistic skills, which then pushed them to want to study abroad. The analysis of the interview transcripts identified five key categories of motivations (and several sub-categories) that were common among the interviewees. These were mainly related to perceived outcomes of studying abroad, related to personal and professional growth. For example, students assumed that
new socio-cultural and travel experiences when studying in a foreign country would positively impact on their personalities. The motivations influencing students during all stages of their decision-making are summarised shown in Table 22 below and are further examined in a sense of the strength of each of these motivations throughout this chapter.

**Table 22: Areas of motivations for studying abroad**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The desire to travel</td>
<td>Personal growth (self-development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be exposed to a new culture and lifestyle</td>
<td>Professional growth (to enhance academic performance and career prospects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet new people from all over the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve linguistic skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To acquire new academic skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth (self-development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth (to enhance academic performance and career prospects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To desire to enhance career and job prospects was seen by the interviewees as a general outcome of studying abroad, and not as a specific motivation to select Australia as a study destination. Around a third of the interviewees were convinced that a study abroad experience would enhance their job prospects. These interviewees said that while study abroad was good for the resume in general, they were convinced that most employers expect employees to have had such an experience. For example, one interviewee pointed out that studying abroad is “*important for my career and CV as it is most important for global jobs and businesses*” (16).

During the predisposition stage, students from the interview group tend not to be focused on a particular destination. However, as students’ plans to study abroad progressed, more specific motivations became apparent when they were deciding whether or not to choose Australia as their destination. Students’ motivations to study abroad, and to study in Australia, overlap and are related to a variety of attributes that Australia offers to international students. Survey respondents were not asked about their motivations to study abroad in the predisposition stage. The different motivations and factors which were important in students’ decisions to
select their host country and institution are examined and discussed in the next section.

6.2.3 The predisposition stage: Discussion of key findings

Although there is little systematic research related to European temporary mobile students’ stages of decision-making, it has been suggested that these students first consider studying abroad two to four years before eventually doing so, and that their next step is likely to concentrate on their choice of host country (Teichler 2004b). This current study shines further light on the timeline and stages of European students’ decision-making.

As examined above, in the predisposition stage, interviewees were strongest motivated to study abroad by a desire to travel and an interest in experiencing other cultures, and also a desire to develop their personal and professional skills. The findings of this current study are consistent with findings in the literature related to European students in temporary mobility programs. Vossensteyn et al. (2010), in a study of over 20,000 European students from seven countries, found that the majority were motivated to participate in ERASMUS or non-ERASMUS programs for reasons such as ‘personal development’, to ‘acquire soft-skills’, ‘to improve foreign language skills’ and to ‘meet new people’. The desire to increase life experience rather than to improve academic skills has been reported as the most frequent reason to study abroad by prospective international students in the UK (Findlay et al. 2006). This finding has been supported by other studies which have found that seeking personal development, and gaining experiences and knowledge of other cultures and languages, are often among the most important reasons for short-term (credit) mobility of European students (HEFCE 2004; Krzaklewska & Krupnik 2006; Lesjak et al. 2015; Teichler 2004b; Van Mol & Timmerman 2013). Although gaining linguistic skills is often considered to be a driver of temporary mobility, it must be mentioned that is has also been reported that the desire to improve language skills is for some students not an important reason to study abroad (Daly 2002), or even that not speaking the language of a potential host country is a significant barrier to
the mobility of students from English-speaking countries who are monolingual (Findlay et al. 2006; Vossensteyn et al. 2010).

The literature also revealed that the motivations of temporarily mobile students coming to Europe, and of those studying outside of Europe, are similar. For example, New Zealand students saw the exposure to different cultures as a key benefit of participating in an international exchange program (Doyle et al. 2010). They also perceived enhancement of linguistic knowledge as well as career opportunities as important benefits.

Similar to the findings of this study, the existing literature has found that the motivation to enhance career opportunities often ranks lower than socio-cultural and language motivations, but remains an important motivational factor for European students when temporarily study abroad (King, R, Findlay & Ahrens 2010; Vossensteyn et al. 2010). Eder (2010) found that the opportunity to enhance career prospects pushes students to participate in temporary mobility programs and is based on the presumption that having an international study experience is nowadays expected by employers. In contrast, students from developing countries are more motivated to study abroad by economic and migration factors (Hercog & Van de Laar 2013; Wei 2013). These students are seeking a degree rather than temporary mobility in order to obtain a higher quality of tertiary education that is not available in their Asian (Chen, C-H & Zimitat 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Park 2009) and African home countries (Maringe & Carter 2007; Mpinganjira 2009). Therefore, given the diversity of tertiary students, the reasons and motivations influencing them to study abroad and in their choice of destination country, are likely to differ significantly depending on factors including student’s cultural backgrounds, nationality and chosen study program (Woodfield 2010).

6.3 Destination decision: Students' decision to temporarily study abroad in Australia

The stage of ‘destination decision’ usually begins after prospective international students have decided to participate in a study mobility program. During this stage
the students search for more information about the attributes of the country or countries they are considering as destinations. This stage ends when the prospective international students select where they want to study. The student then usually searches for more specific information in order to select their host institution.

This section examines which attributes of Australia motivate and attract European students to study there, and also examines which factors were the most and also the least important and influential in their choice of Australia rather than another destination. Over half of the interviewees (59%) chose Australia a year or more before commencing their overseas semester; the other interviewees selected Australia less than a year before. Some students also considered other countries and Australia was only one option, and sometimes not their preferred destination. Therefore, these students considered the most important pull factors of the different study destinations, and compared them several times before making a final decision. Some students also decided at this stage to apply for a study abroad program in more than one country and therefore their decision to study in Australia was not finalised at this stage. This suggests that the stages of destination and host institution selection can overlap which is depicted in the conceptual framework underpinning this study.

There was no significant difference in the decision times of interviewees and survey respondents depending whether they studied as exchange or a free-mover students, the situation was different for the survey respondents.

Altogether, it can be acknowledged that most European students selected their study abroad country first and their host institution later.

6.3.1 Motivations to study abroad in Australia

It was identified in the previous section that one of the factors that motivated European students to study abroad was a desire to travel, to experience a new culture and lifestyle, and to enhance academic and linguistic skills. These motivations, which overlap and are related to a variety of attributes that Australia offers to international
students, became more specific when students selected Australia as their study abroad destination.

While any study abroad experience (including study in another country in Europe) would offer students the opportunity to experience another culture, most interviewees perceived the chance to study in Australia as an opportunity to experience a more different culture than they would do if they studied in another European country. For example, one interviewee was curious “to learn and to adapt to a new culture” and “to learn about the Aborigine’s culture” (17). Some of the interviewees mentioned that by studying in Australia they would not only learn about another Western culture but would probably experience many other international cultures as they were aware that in Australia “there are international students from all over the world” (3). To have “this opportunity to hang out with all these different cultures and share your views of the world ... and maybe try to put different pieces of my knowledge and their knowledge together and make something bigger and better out of it” (29) was another important motivation for one interviewee.

The students felt they would be more likely to experience a new culture and lifestyle if they studied far from home and outside of Europe. While this can be viewed as a motivational factor that pulls students to study in Australia, it can be also seen as a factor which pushes students to study outside of Europe to experience something their home country or another European country cannot offer to them.

The opportunity to study abroad, a long distance from home, was a highly important factor for 35% of interviewees and most other interviewees also considered Australia’s distance from Europe to be an advantage. One interviewee said that “The location influenced me as well ... yes, something more far away, more exotic ... something I did not know from home” (18). Another interviewee commented “I think it is the furthest place you can go from Europe so I thought it was perfect to study in Australia because I can combine to be at the furthest place and the right time to visit Australia. I think everyone is looking for a Promised Land and I think America is not more the ‘Promised Land’, so maybe Australia” (28). One student wanted to do something different, arguing that it is “so common for European students to study
abroad just in another European country” (25). Australia’s remote geographical location was considered unique by the students and this linked to the interviewees’ desire to have ‘a real study and living abroad experience’.

While students described a range of important motivations for selecting Australia as their study destination, to experience a new culture and lifestyle, and to improve their English skills, were considered by most interviewees as important motivations. As demonstrated in Figure 18 below, most interviewees stated that they definitely wanted to study in an English-speaking country as they were highly motivated to improve their English language skills while studying abroad. Furthermore, 45% of the interviewees indicated that they saw the opportunity to experience a different learning style and another academic system as an important benefit which motivated them to study outside of Europe. One interviewee stated that “the academic world [in Australia] compared to Iceland and obviously improve my study skills” was as important to her as “the whole experience of it, like meeting people and seeing things” (25). Similarly, another interviewee said that a mixture of factors motivated her to study in Australia: “English, definitely, getting to know another country which is so far away from home that if I had not come here I would probably never have lived ... and also academically speaking ... so basically English, academic side and then the whole experience” (26).

Figure 18: Motivations to SA in Australia, Interviewees (N=29), in Percentages
To meet new people from all over the world was also cited as a motivation by interviewees, though less frequently. One interviewee said while it was important to improve his English and gain another perspective academically, he was also looking forward “to meeting other people and to have contacts from all over the world” (22) as he had heard about the high concentration of foreign people in Australia.

While some benefits such as improving English skills and learning about other cultures could also have been experienced in another English-speaking country such as the US, Canada or New Zealand, these motivations were interrelated with other factors specific to Australia. Most interviewees assumed that the distinct physical and social characteristics of Australia would translate into opportunities for personal development as they would learn more about themselves and become more independent while studying in a country far away from their home country. For example, one student said: “I hope to become more independent and to enhance my personality as I am on my own and far away. I hope to be able to pick up a little bit of the ‘no worries’ mentality and the easy-going lifestyle I heard about” (14). Another interviewee explained: “I think I want to go home and have no regrets ... being more open-minded, being more able to adopt myself to a different situation, different culture, different people, a different way of thinking and that would be a great adventure for me, even just for the day to day life and later to find a job, maybe to work abroad” (18). It is evident that these European students’ motivations go beyond academic considerations and that personal development is a key motivation for studying abroad.

As demonstrated in Table 23 below, similar to the interviewees, the survey group reported that ‘improving English skills’, the ‘desire to broaden their academic experience and horizon’ and also ‘to have a “real abroad” experience, without being able to go home during the SA semester’ were important motivational factors influencing respondents’ decisions to study in Australia, as all three factors attained a mean over 4. A mean of 3.62 also indicates that over half of the respondents considered studying abroad in Australia as an opportunity for ‘self-development’.
Table 23: Important factors in survey respondents’ decisions to study in Australia (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors important:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve English skills</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to broaden my academic experience and horizon</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a &quot;real abroad&quot; experience, without being able to go home during the SA semester</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand myself better</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1='Strongly disagree' to 5='Strongly agree'

Other motivations that were less frequently given

Some students were also motivated by additional factors which played an important role in their selection of Australia as their study destination. Four interviewees (14%) explained that their previous experience of being in Australia encouraged them to return as a student. Two had been in Australia on holidays with their parents, one had participated in a one year au pair program and another had travelled for six months around Australia on her own. In particular the ‘relaxed lifestyle in Australia’ and the ‘friendliness and openness of the Australian people’ were influential in all of these students’ decisions to choose Australia as their study abroad destinations. Around a quarter of survey respondents (24%) also reported previous travel experiences in Australia and the opportunity ‘to spend time in Australia again’ as motivations for studying in Australia. The significance of this finding is that prior positive experience of a destination can influence a student’s choice of a study abroad destination.

Six interviewees (21%) commented in the pre-SA interview that they had already considered living in Australia after studying there, which influenced their decision to study in Australia. For example, interviewees said that “it indirectly influenced my decision as it would be an option to live in Australia if there would be a job opportunity and this way I can check it out” (7), and “Yes, it influenced my decision as I might do a master’s there” (13). These interviewees saw the semester as an opportunity to “figure out I want to work in Australia later as I am interested if there are any job opportunities coming up” (6); and to see “how things are in Australia” (20).
Almost half of the survey respondents (47%) reported that they wanted to study in Australia to see if they wanted to live in Australia in the future, which is substantially higher percentage than in the interview group.

It is evident that most European students were motivated to study abroad by a combination of factors and anticipated outcomes. This demonstrates again that socio-cognitive factors such as students’ specific motivations for studying abroad and their individual preferences, combined with existing knowledge as described above, worked as a pre-selection process when deciding which countries could be suitable as a study abroad destinations. Australia’s location outside of Europe and its unique multi-cultural context were stated as strong destination ‘pull’ factors, for the students. However, while students were already influenced by all or some of the above mentioned factors, the majority also cited the image of Australia as an influence in their decision. Furthermore, most students considered all available information and country-specific factors about Australia before finally deciding to study there.

6.3.2 Image of Australia as an influential factor in students’ decision-making processes

While only one-third of the interviewees stated that they knew a lot about Australia in general, over half of the survey respondents (52%) reported that they had sufficient knowledge about Australia before they applied to study there. Over a third of respondents also reported they had good information ‘about their host city and university’. However, it should be noted that survey respondents were responding post-study rather than pre-study, unlike the interviewees, and this may have changed their perceptions of how much they knew about Australia before their decision to study there.

Although most interviewees stated that they did not have a comprehensive knowledge of Australia before applying to study there, 17 (59%) of the 29 interviewees agreed that the positive image of Australia, as a nation and also the positive image about certain cities in Australia influenced their decision to select
Australia. Most of these 17 interviewees revealed that they had a positive image of Australia because of the sun, the beaches and the good weather. For example, one interviewee said that although she did not know much about Australia she had “this picture of a blue sky, the sun and beaches in her head” (8). Similarly, another interviewee said that it was not “a real knowledge about Australia it was more the image of a sunny, dreamy country” which influenced her decision (19).

The majority of these 17 interviewees also revealed that they had a positive image of Australia because of the apparently easy-going lifestyle and reported friendliness of Australians. For example, one interviewee agreed that he was influenced by the image of Australia as he considered Australia to have a “more relaxed lifestyle, not so strict and planned” and was “looking forward to experience this lifestyle...” (17). Another student described that the image of Australia “really appealed to me and also added to my choice” that “in Denmark, Australians have a reputation about being really open-minded and relaxed”. She further stated that “all Australians I met in my life have been extremely nice and very warm-hearted and that is just a nice feeling to know that most likely and hopefully you will meet a lot of kind people” (10). Similarly, another interviewee said “When I think about an image it is more about the Australian people. I thought they are very friendly and open, and yeah I think that played a big role just to come down and people are just taking care of you” (22).

Another interviewee who had been in Sydney for a week while travelling with his parents eight years before stated that the image of Australia influenced his decision: “absolutely! Australia has a good reputation regarding the people and their mentality. The multi-cultural lifestyle in Sydney was the main reason why I wanted to go there” (6). The other two students who stayed in Australia before (one for six months and one for a year) mentioned that their previous experience of the ‘relaxed lifestyle in Australia’ and the ‘friendliness and openness of the Australian people’ had encouraged them to come back to Australia. It appears that the image of the ‘easy-going lifestyle’ in Australia seemed to play a particularly role in interviewees’ selection of Australia as over half of the interviewees cited this in one way or another throughout the interview.
One other interviewee who studies Sport Management reported that he was more influenced by the image of Sydney: “I think of the Olympic Games ... it looked so nice on television ... that is pretty much what I imagined in my head when I think of Sydney, the Opera House and the Olympic Games” (20).

Like the interviewees, most survey respondents reported that ‘to live in a multicultural environment’ and ‘the image of an easy-going lifestyle in Australia’ were influential in their selection of Australia (see Table 24 below). These factors attained means of 4.07 and 3.98 respectively.

Table 24: Factors influencing survey respondents’ decision to study in Australia (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors influential:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To live in a multi-cultural environment</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image of an ‘easy-going-lifestyle’ in Australia</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1=‘Strongly disagree’ to 5=‘Strongly agree’

Safety issues

The image or reputation of a country is often closely related to perceptions of safety. In general, all interviewees indicated that they considered Australia to be a safe country to live, study and travel in. Eighteen (62%) of the 29 of interviewees, including 16 female and two male students, indicated that it was either very or quite important for them to study abroad in a safe location. A common theme for the female interviewees was that because they would be living on their own far from home, safety was a key reason to choose Australia as a study destination over other places. Most female students made similar comments to the interviewee who said: “Yes, the safety issue has been very, very important. I wanted to go to a Western developed country without fears to get around on my own as a woman.” (3) Another interviewee stated “because if you are living here for months and do not feel well and secure that ruins the whole experience” (18). However, some of them indicated that they ‘just kind of knew that Australia was a safe country’ and did not look for any particular information, and were not concerned about specific safety issues. For example, one female interviewee commented that “I knew that Australia and Sydney are safe and would not do a study abroad program in an unsafe place like Johannesburg” (8).
The interviewees (28%) who stated that safety issues were not too important, and also the three interviewees (10%) who indicated that safety issues did not influence their decision-making processes at all, still said they preferred to study abroad in a safe environment. One student said that the main focus of studying abroad should be on study and not on “worrying about the environment” (5) and another student saw it as an “advantage that it is safe in Australia” (17). Another interviewee said “No I would not say it was a big point in my decision, like I would have gone to other countries as well, like South Africa.... but the fact that Australia feels kind of like Europe in a way I guess it helps to make you feel more at home” (25). Thus, all of these interviewees also appreciated that to their knowledge, Australia was a safe place to live and study.

In summary, this study found that among the European students, Australia had an image of being a friendly, safe and multi-cultural country with an easy-going lifestyle. Overall it appears that the positive image or attributes of Australia influenced most interviewees in their destination selection, although the majority did not have a comprehensive knowledge of Australia before applying to study there. Over half of the interviewees stated that it was either very or quite important for them to study abroad in a safe location.

6.3.3 Studying in Australia: an opportunity to escape winter and enjoy the sun

The results of this study further revealed that a number of climatic, location and environmental attributes, pulled European students to study in Australia.

As shown in Figure 19 below, most interviewees (79%) indicated that the opportunity to study abroad while at the same time escaping a European winter and living in a warm and sunny climate was very important in their choice of Australia. These interviewees commonly stated that they wanted to combine the essence of studying abroad with a very pleasant lifestyle. Statements, such as the following example, were very common among these interviewees: “I wanted to escape winter; to be in
the sun and live in a warm climate while studying abroad was definitely a factor for my decision to come to Australia” (8).

![Bar graph showing influence of location factors](image)

**Figure 19:** Influence of location factors, Interviewees (N=29), in Percentages

Furthermore, the opportunity to live close to the ocean and the beach while studying was very attractive and was an important consideration for almost half of the interviewees (45%). A few interviewees stated that their desire to live close to the beach influenced not only their general decision to study in Australia but also their choice of host university. For example, one interviewee said “I was really searching for the right location in Australia to make sure I can live close to the beach and learn how to surf” (9). In addition, the opportunity to live in a country with a different environment to their home country encouraged most interviewees to choose Australia. Interviewees made similar comments as these two students who said: “To live in a different climate and environment with a different flora and fauna interested me. Besides, I always wanted to live close to the beach and have the opportunity to go surfing” (2), and “The national protected area is really fascinating because we do not have this wild nature in Europe” (23). The findings reveal that most interviewees were drawn by the unique natural environment that Australia offers.

For six interviewees (21%) it was also important to study somewhere where they could enjoy outdoor activities which were not as accessible at home. For example, one student was influenced in her decision to come to Australia and to select Cairns in particular as her study destination because of the “opportunity to do outdoor...
activities I cannot do in Germany, for example diving” (1). The opportunity to learn to surf or to go surfing was mentioned by several interviewees as an influential factor in their decision. A male Danish student said “I wanted to go further away than England … Yeah, I wanted to go surfing and live near the beaches, so, experience the weather and go surfing … you have so many opportunities in Australia, for example hiking, scuba diving, because you have the good weather” (20).

Similarities regarding location and environment-related decision-making factors were found between the interview and survey groups. The high means demonstrate that most survey respondents agreed to the statements shown in Table 25 below, as being influential in their decisions to study in Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors influential:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The geographic location of Australia</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to do things not available in home country</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a warmer climate than at home</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live close to the beach</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1=’Strongly disagree’ to 5=’Strongly agree’

Similar to the interview findings, ‘the geographic location of Australia’ and ‘to have a warmer climate than at home’ particularly encouraged survey respondents to study in Australia. The opportunity to undertake activities in Australia which they could not undertake in their home country was also reported by most respondents (mean=4.20) as an influential factor. Notably, this factor was influential for more students in the survey group than in the interview group. However, survey respondents answered this question after their study experience. These students had been away from Australia for longer and it is possible that they were fonder and more nostalgic towards Australia when answering this question. This might explain the difference between their responses and those of the interviewees who responded prior to their experiences in Australia. It is acknowledged that certain study findings, such as the influence of Australia’s image, need to be viewed in the context of the time when the data was collected. This is because country factors can differ according to whether or not the students were questioned before or after their study abroad experiences.
It is evident from the findings that the most important and influential factors in European students’ decisions to study in Australia were a combination of environmental and location factors. The following statement of one interviewee echoes what many other interviewees said: “The fact that I could escape a winter in Germany and live far away from home, in a warm climate and close to the beach while studying was definitely more important in my decision ... than any academic-related factors” (11).

6.3.4 An opportunity to combine studying abroad with travel

In the pre-SA interview, students were asked about their intentions to travel during their Australian sojourn. They were also asked how important the opportunity to travel was in their decision to select Australia as their study destination. In the post-SA interview students were asked about their actual travel behaviours. These questions were asked in order to determine whether or not the students’ actual travel behaviour reflected their initial pre-study abroad intentions. All interviewees expressed their desire to travel and experience some of Australia’s nature, cultural and tourist attractions during their Australian sojourn and the majority said that they had been interested in travelling to Australia before they considered it as a study destination. For example, one student said: “Australia is one of my dreams ... Australia has always been on my mind. So I thought I would take this [study] opportunity and go” (23).

Most interviewees decided to come to Australia in order to study abroad and to travel. The two opportunities were both important and a strong relationship between study and travel was apparent. For example, some interviewees stated that they had always wanted to travel to Australia but had not done so because it was too far from Europe to go there for a short holiday. For example, one interviewee stated that living and studying in Australia for a semester: “was a one-off opportunity ... not only living there for two or three weeks as a tourist” (18). Similarly, two other interviewees commented that: “Because it is so far away ... I thought that it would be a great
opportunity to go there for half a year, study ... but also to travel and see a bit of the country” (2), and: “Travelling was definitely one of the main reasons why I came to Australia without having time to do it I would not have come” (6).

When interviewees were asked in the post-SA interview if they would have selected Australia as their study destination without the opportunity to travel, seven interviewees (24%) said that they definitely would not have selected Australia, and another seven students said that they probably would not have selected Australia without the opportunity to travel there as well. Out of the 15 (52%) interviewees who stated that they would have studied in Australia even without the opportunity to travel, eleven stated that their travel experiences in Australia were still very important. Furthermore, interviewees revealed that to combine a ‘beneficial’ experience with a ‘pleasurable’ experience was important to them, commenting for example that “it was the whole package so you have your study and you have also your travel and your leisure time.” (7), and “I would say the travelling was a really important part ... not just to stay at one place but to travel” (9).

Most interviewees made comments similar to the following: “I wanted to explore Australia ... to get to know the culture, meet different people... because you do not have a chance to visit this country so often because it is that far away” (13). Another interviewee was not sure if she would have selected Australia without also having time to travel as travelling “was basically the reward for studying... like: as soon as I am done I have two months where I can just leave everything else behind and just travel” (12). Another interviewee also mentioned that as it is “so expensive to come here and to stay here you also want travel” (8).

As acknowledged previously, almost all interviewees were motivated to study in Australia in order to experience a new culture. These students felt that it takes more than just studying in a foreign country to experience a new culture. As one interviewee explained, the opportunity to travel was “as important as studying there ... because I wanted to experience a new culture and you cannot only study to experience a new culture. I think travelling is really important because you get to
know the whole idea, what is behind the characters of Australian people or the country and how they think” (3).

Similarly, another interviewee stated: “I think without the possibility to travel I would not have chosen Australia as a country to study in. I think when you come to another country to study there, getting to know the people and the country simply takes priority above studying as studying is the same everywhere in the world ... I think travelling, seeing the country and learning about a foreign culture is the main aim of studying abroad” (4).

Survey respondents were also asked if the ability ‘to explore and travel in Australia’ while studying was important in their decision to select Australia as their study destination. As demonstrated in Table 26 below, with a mean of 4.61 the ability ‘to explore and travel in Australia’ while studying abroad was reported as the most important out of all factors in respondents’ decision-making processes. It is clear that a strong relationship between study abroad and travel exists for European students selecting Australia as their destination. The results revealed that the opportunity ‘to live in a country that respondents may otherwise probably never visit’ was also considered ‘important’ by over a third of respondents, and this factor attained a mean of 3.19.

Table 26: Factors considered important in survey respondents’ decision to study in Australia (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors important:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to explore and travel in Australia</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live in a country probably never visit otherwise</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1=’Strongly disagree’ to 5=’Strongly agree’

Furthermore, and as demonstrated in Figure 20 below, over a third of the respondents reported that they definitely would not (9%) or probably would not (23%) have come to Australia for a study abroad semester if they had not been able to also travel during their Australian sojourn.
Factors influencing key stages of decision-making

It was stated previously in this section that the image of Australia as an attractive tourism and travel destination was also highly influential in European students’ decisions. The opportunity to travel while studying in Australia was considered very important to all interviewees and to almost all survey respondents. All interviewees and almost all respondents had plans to travel during their Australian sojourn prior to their arrival in Australia. Interviewees’ and survey respondents’ travel behaviour and experiences during their Australian sojourn are further discussed in the next chapter.

6.3.5 The role of academic factors in country choice

As outlined above, most European students had a desire to broaden their academic horizons while studying abroad. Therefore, selecting a host country (and university) known for providing good quality higher education was deemed important, particularly for around a third of the interviewees. For example, one of the ten interviewees who stated that the high quality of Australians tertiary institutions was quite an important criterion said: “it was definitely important that the academic level was good and that they had a good reputation and that they offer good facilities and
so on ... other things are important for me as well, but if I had the feeling that the
university was not good or they could not offer me a responsible academic level then
I would have never chosen it. Because, I mean I am going to Australia and I am looking
forward to the whole experience but ... I am going to school after all and it is important
for me.” (10). Most interviewees pointed out that they were aware of the good
quality of the Australian tertiary education system in general and the excellent
reputations of some Australian universities. To study abroad in a country with a
comparable academic system to their home universities and being in an environment
where English is the teaching language, were stated as the only important academic-
related factors influencing interviewees’ choice of Australia as their study
destination.

Survey respondents reported which factors relating to their academic study abroad
experiences were influential in a) their decision to study abroad in Australia (these
are presented in Table 27 below), and b) their choice of host university (these are
examined in Section 6.4). Similar to the interviewees, a mean of 3.04 indicates that
the ‘reputation of the Australian higher education system’ was not reported as a very
influential academic factor in survey respondents’ selection of their host country. The
findings demonstrate that the ‘location of host university’ and the ‘range and quality
of university courses available’ were reported as most influential in respondents’
choices of Australia as their host country, attaining means score of 3.75 and 3.35,
respectively.

Table 27: Academic-related factors influential in survey respondents’ decision to study in
Australia (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors influential:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location of host university</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range and quality of university courses available</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing exchange program</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA semester time compatible with home semester</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and services offered for international students</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of the Australian higher education system</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1='Strongly disagree' to 5='Strongly agree'

The availability of exchange programs in Australia was reported as influential in
respondents’ choices of Australia by slightly more respondents than the number who
eventually studied in an exchange program (92 versus 85 respondents). This indicates that more respondents intended to study in an exchange program in Australia than actually received an exchange place.

The findings reveal that academic-related factors did not play a very important role in students’ selection of Australia. However, these factors should not be disregarded altogether as they increased in importance when students considered the choice of host university. Therefore, the influence of academic-related factors in students’ selection of their host institution will be examined in more detail in Section 6.4.

### 6.3.6 Influence of economic factors in European students’ decision-making

Most interviewees (83%) indicated that they were aware of the high study and living costs in Australia. However, only a few of these interviewees (12%) mentioned that this knowledge influenced their decision-making and stated that on finding out about the high costs in Australia they reconsidered their preference to study in Australia. Nevertheless, in the end positive factors such as the travel opportunities Australia offered, and the perception of the experience being an investment in their future, were more important to them. Therefore, they made the decision to study in Australia and to deal with the relatively high costs. Another interviewee communicated that she wanted to study in Australia anyway, but because of the high costs she had chosen Adelaide instead of Sydney as a host city as “living costs are cheaper there” (9). This is an interesting finding which highlights the nuanced decision-making that students engage in whereby they make compromises such as opting to live and study in a less expensive host city in order to make the experience more affordable.

It was also of interest to find out if the opportunity to work in Australia while studying was influential in European students’ decisions. Only eight (28%) of the 29 interviewees indicated that the opportunity to work influenced their decision to some extent. Another 28% of interviewees had no knowledge about the work opportunities in Australia before applying to study abroad in Australia.
Similarly to the interview group, low means indicate that ‘to be able to work as a student’ (mean=2.06, SD 1.19) and ‘lower costs of study fees’ (mean=1.53/SD.93) were not influential in survey respondents’ decisions to select Australia as their study destination. Altogether, the findings indicate that economic factors such as the high costs of studying in Australia and the opportunity to work in Australia did not influence the majority of students in their decisions to select Australia as their study destination.

6.3.7 Discussion of the importance of country factors

Australia was chosen because the European students’ believed that it was the country which would best meet their study abroad and travel needs. Students were motivated to study abroad in Australia by a desire to travel in Australia, to experience the Australian culture and lifestyle, and to develop English and academic skills. All country and location pull factors related to lifestyle, travel and outdoor opportunities, the weather and environment of Australia, such as the proximity to beaches and opportunities for adventure, were reported by most European students as more important and influential when selecting their study destination than any factors related to their academic experiences. Tourism and travel opportunities offered to the students, and the geographic location of Australia, were cited as most important factors influencing students’ selection of Australia as their study destination. The findings will be discussed in more details below.

The high importance of country image

In this study it was found students perceived that Australia to have an image of being a friendly, safe and multi-cultural country with an easy-going-lifestyle. This was cited as an important pull factor for selecting Australia among European students. A previous study also found that Western, temporarily mobile students’ choice of Australia as a destination was positively influenced by its image as a country with sunny weather, good beaches and friendly people (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). A link between the image of Australia and international students’ destination choices was also evident in a study conducted by Aaron-Tham (2006). His findings showed
that international students saw Australia as a country with a more comfortable pace of life, and with more interesting wildlife and nature compared with other English-speaking countries. Aaron-Tham (2006) concluded that these students, who came mainly from Asian countries, chose Australia as an overseas study destination due to these image factors. Glover’s (2011b) and Michael et al.’s (2003) studies also explored the link between image and destination choice and confirmed that tourism imagery has a considerable influence international students’ decisions to study in Australia. However, there is a limit to the extent to which the findings of the three studies mentioned above can be compared with my study as most students in these studies came from Asian countries and were studying in full-degree programs.

As discussed above, the image or reputation of a country is often closely related to perceptions of safety. Safety issues were found to have a high priority for Africans studying in the UK when they were choosing a study destination in a degree program abroad (Maringe & Carter 2007). This was also the case for Asians studying in Australia (Aaron-Tham 2006), in Canada (Chen, L-H 2006) and in European countries (Muche & Waechter 2005). While most of the Europeans in my study also preferred to study abroad in a safe environment, safety issues were important but not considered as highly significant decision-making factors when selecting Australia as a destination. Rather, it was evident that the interviewees perceived Australia as a safe Western country and trusted their friends, peer students or other people from their social networks who had previously travelled in Australia and had reported Australia to be a safe country. Similarly, in a study among exchange students studying in Australia it was found that safety was not considered as ‘highly important’ in their selection of a host country, as Australia was perceived as a relatively safe destination (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008).

**Highly influential location and climate/environment factors**

In this study most of the participants selected Australia as their study destination because they were driven by a need to have a ‘real study abroad experience’ in which they were far away from their home countries and were not able to go home over the weekend, which would have been possible if they had chosen a European country. Therefore, to live a great distance from home while studying, and coping
with the knowledge of the vast distance between home and their place of study, was cited by most European students as an important part of their decision to come to Australia. To my knowledge, only one other study – of exchange students from Europe and America – has found that Australia’s remoteness was moderately important factor in students’ destination choices (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008).

Other studies did not confirm that studying abroad far from home was an important factor. For example, Australian exchange students placed a greater value on cultural similarity than geographic factors when selecting their host country (Daly 2002). Similarly, Chew (2011) found that prospective temporary mobile students from Australia did not report geographic proximity or remoteness of host country as an important factor. On the other hand, geographic proximity between home and host country has been found to be a matter of concern for degree mobile students from Asian countries. For example, previous studies found that most students from Singapore (Chen, C-H & Zimitat 2006) or Indonesia (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002) were motivated to study in Australia due to the close proximity to their home country. Shanka, Ali-Knight & Pope (2002) also found that for students from Indonesia and Singapore proximity to home was important for their selection of an institution in Australia. However, differences among groups from various cultural backgrounds were highlighted, and the authors found a relationship between country of residence and choice criteria for overseas study destinations. That European students are pulled/attracted to Australia because of its remoteness is a new and unique finding which demonstrates cultural differences between study abroad students, and reinforces the need to better understand the push and pull factors influencing different ethnicities/nationalities, rather than treating them as one homogenous group.

The fact that the seasons are opposite to those in Europe, and the warmer climate of Australia enabled most students to escape a Europe winter and instead experience a summer close to the beach were also stated as major advantages of studying in Australia. These European students preferred to study abroad in a completely different location and climate to home and were attracted/pulled by the unique location and climate attributes of Australia. Furthermore, the incentive to study and
live in a country where European students can undertake outdoor activities not available in their home country was also highly influential in their choice of Australia and partly also their host city and institution.

Similar to findings in this study, Daly’s (2002) study of Australian students reported retrospectively that they were primarily motivated to participate in an exchange program by a general desire to travel and to experience another culture. It was also found by Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe (2008) that push factors related to social interaction and experiences in a different culture were among the strongest motivations for students coming mainly from America and Europe to participate in an exchange program in Australia. Other studies have also found that a warm and sunny climate plays a key role in attracting European credit mobile students (González, Mesanza & Mariel 2011) and exchange students selecting Australia as their study destination (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). Likewise, in a study at a mid-sized southern university in the US, credit mobile students also stated that the ‘comfortable, nice, sunny’ climate and the location had been an influence on their selection of university (Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010).

Similarly, climate factors were reported as influential among degree mobile students. The comfortable climate was reported by the majority of Asian students as an influencing factor when choosing Australia as a study destination (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). It was confirmed in another study that climate and geography attributes were the primary drivers for international students selecting their host institution in Queensland, Australia (Ruhanen & McLennan 2010). In another study, institutions that are located ‘close to the sea’ or that are well situated for outdoor activities such as surfing, have also been highlighted as important factors for international degree students in the UK (Huang 2008).

**Travel opportunities as important as the opportunity to study abroad**

It was found in this study that the opportunity to travel while studying in Australia was highly important to all interviewees and to almost all survey respondents when selecting Australia as their study destination. The recreational travel-specific motivation to study in Australia found among European students supports the
findings of previous studies. For example, the desire to travel was found to be a strong motivator for participating in an international exchange program for European students (Teichler 2004b), and also for international students from various countries who selected Australia for their exchange programs (Freestone & Geldens 2008; Jarvis & Peel 2008; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). Similar findings have been reported in the US and other parts in the world (Van Hoof & Verbeeten 2005). For example, in Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe’s (2008) research among former exchange students coming mainly from Western countries, it was found that the desire to travel recreationally was a primary motivator when undertaking an educational exchange program in Australia. To enjoy ‘Australia’s sea, sun and surf’, the ‘tourist and cultural attractions in Australia’ and ‘Australia’s scenery and diverse natural environment’ were stated as significant pull factors for choosing Australia as their study abroad destination. However, the above study did not specify which tourist and cultural attractions these students were particularly interested in, and it did not investigate the travel behaviours and preferences of these exchange students when studying in Australia.

In contrast, Aaron-Tham (2006) concluded that the motivations of Asian students to study in Australia had little to do with the opportunities for recreational travel, and travel opportunities were not seen as an important decision-making factor. In Aaron-Tham’s study students commented that prior to their decision to study in Australia they ‘did not think of going on holiday in Australia’ and that ‘travelling was not on the agenda and the last thing on my mind’. Instead, the cost of studying, the completion time of courses and safety issues were the primary factors considered by these students. However, the 23 participants in Aaron-Tham’s study originated mainly from Asian countries and all were studying at a single university in Queensland. As it was not stated if they were studying in a temporary or degree mobility program, there are limits to the extent to which this study can be compared with my study. Michael, Armstrong and King (2003) examined why students from Asian countries opt for Australia as their study destination and also investigated their recreational travel behaviour while studying. Although most of these Asian students travelled while
studying in Australia, travel opportunities were not important considerations in their choice of Australia as their study destination.

**Contrasting attitudes towards academic and economic factors**

Several studies on international degree students have indicated that the worldwide recognition, prestige and quality of a higher education system abroad are the most important factors for students when choosing their host countries and institutions (Chen, L-H 2006; Maringe & Carter 2007; Muche & Waechter 2005). In contrast, the findings of my study revealed that academic- or institution-related factors did not play a very important role for European students when selecting Australia as their destination. However, academic-related factors should not be disregarded altogether as their importance increased slightly when European students considered the choice of host university. These results support those of other researchers including Daly (2002), Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008), and Doyle (2010). Conversely, it is interesting to note that Chew (2011) found that for Australian students who intended to participate in an exchange program, the ‘quality of education’ at the destination was the most important factor in their choice of study destination.

Although most European students were aware of the high living costs in Australia this study found that economic factors did not play a very important part in students’ choice of destination. Financial issues are often more important for students studying abroad for a longer periods of time such as in the case of degree programs (Chen, L-H 2007; Lee, C-F 2013; Muche & Waechter 2005). However, as outlined in Section 6.2.1 most of the European students received financial support of their home government or university to cover their study fees abroad, and some students also received financial support for their living costs in Australia. The interviewees gave the impression that studying in Australia was a ‘once in a life-time opportunity’ for them and took a pragmatic approach to dealing with the higher living costs, for example by saving money prior to their Australian sojourn, or in some cases, by making decisions about where to study based on the perceived costs of living in particular cities.

This study found that the least important destination pull factor was the opportunity to undertake a part-time job in Australia. This finding was consistent with other
studies of temporary mobile students which also found that the opportunity to undertake part-time work while studying abroad was not an important factor influencing students’ intention (Chew & Croy 2011) or decision to study overseas (King, R, Findlay & Ahrens 2010; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; Vossensteyn et al. 2010). However, the picture is different among degree mobile students, for example, coming from African countries studying in the UK (Maringe & Carter 2007) or Asian countries studying in Australia (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002) or Taiwan (Lee, C-F 2013). Participants in these studies placed higher importance on being able to work part-time during their study overseas. It can be assumed that international degree students often need to work in order to cover the costs of their education abroad, whereas students in temporary study programs focus on opportunities to explore their host countries rather than only concentrating on studying and earning money to survive abroad.

6.4 Selecting the host institution

The ‘stage of institution decision’ usually begins after prospective international students have selected their study abroad host destination. During this stage the students search for information about the attributes of suitable host institutions in their selected host country or countries.

It was found that all interviewees and almost all survey respondents (95%) applied at their host university less than a year before commencing their semester in Australia. While most European students selected their host institution after they selected Australia as their study abroad country, a few exchange students by-passed the process of choosing a host country and looked at host institutions directly. However, it should be noted again that these two stages of decision-making were interconnected and overlapping. Most interviewees said that they while they were searching for general information about Australia they often searched for information about various cities and host institutions at the same time.

However, there were differences between student cohorts in the decision-making stages of their selection of host cities and institutions. The interviewees who studied
as free-movers in Australia usually first decided which city or area of Australia they wanted to study in, and then looked for suitable institutions and courses. As outlined in Section 5.2, 69% of the interviewees’ home institutions had exchange programs with one or more Australian university but only 41% of interviewees studied in an exchange program. The interviewees who decided to study as free-movers despite their home universities’ exchange programs with Australian universities gave two reasons for their decision: First, half of them did not get an exchange place and second, four interviewees preferred to study in Sydney rather than in an exchange program in another Australian city. This indicates again how important location factors are for some students.

6.4.1 Academic/institutional factors less influential for exchange students

Exchange students often did not have much choice regarding their final host city and university as these were pre-selected according to the availability of an exchange spot. However, they could name their first and second choices of host institution if their home university had more than one exchange program in Australia. As outlined in Section 5.3 the students studying in an exchange program gathered less knowledge about their host institutions than the free-mover students did. While academic factors were, in general, less important than location factors in European students’ decisions about studying abroad, it appeared that for exchange students academic factors were even less influential than for the free-movers.

The exchange students in the interview group assumed that their home university would not have an exchange program with a foreign university if the teaching quality was not of a high standard. For example, one interviewee explained: “I looked at the country first because I knew that among all the universities where I could make an exchange program were selected, and in each university we have the opportunity to have courses that are similar to the ones we could have taken in France at our university. So the program was pretty much similar, so I knew that academically speaking all choices were good” (19). For two other exchange students, academic
Factors did not matter at all; these interviewees said that “I did not know anything about Monash University. I just started to seek information when I got the place” (27), and “When I got my email that I am accepted ... I did not know where Monash was ... so I went on Google Maps and searched for Monash” (28). It was an interesting and new finding that exchange students appeared to make assumptions based on the quality of their home university pairing up with similar or better quality host universities in Australia.

A slightly higher percentage of survey respondents (60%) also agreed that an ‘existing exchange programme’ between their home and host universities influenced their selection of their host university, as their choice was restricted by the availability of exchange places. However, some respondents did have some degree of choice as their home university ran partner programs with several Australian universities. Therefore, other academic or institutional factors such as location of university and the range and quality of the courses offered became important for some exchange students. The number of survey respondents who reported that an ‘existing exchange program’ influenced their choice of host country and host university was greater than the number who eventually studied in an exchange program (see Section 6.3.5). It might be the case that some of these respondents were applying for an exchange place first, and when they were not successful in their application, they decided to study at the same university as a free-mover instead, but I do not have evidence to support this possible explanation.

In the survey group, and as demonstrated in Table 28 below, a Mann-Whitney-U-Test indicated differences between free-movers and exchange students in that an existing exchange program was more influential exchange students’ decision when selecting Australia as a study destination (mean=4.51) than it was for free-movers (mean=2.01). As expected, an existing exchange program was also more influential in exchange students’ decisions to select their host institution (4.60) than for free-movers (2.18). This leads to the conclusion that for survey respondents studying in an exchange program, the host university was also predetermined by the availability of an exchange place.
Factors influencing key stages of decision-making

6.4.2 Different range of courses influencing choice of host university

For both the interview and survey samples, the different ranges of courses available influenced the students’ selection of their host university in Australia. In some cases the courses offered at Australian universities, which were often not available at their home university, were also a major pull factor for selecting Australia as a study destination.

Figure 21 below provides an overview of which academic/institutional factors were most important in interviewees’ selection of their host institutions. This figure shows that for most interviewees (72%) the range and quality of courses was an important factor in selecting their host university. Almost half of these interviewees even stated that the variety of courses offered was the most influential selection criterion. An interviewee stated “a variety of courses” offered really caught her interest and was the most important academic selection criterion for her as neither the reputation nor the facilities of her host university were important (1). Similarly, another interviewee who had been to Australia before, said: “I think the only academic reason was that they have a larger range of electives that we have [at home]”. One interviewee who had a choice of four different exchange programs in Australia stated: “I thought the university was well suited for my interests. But it was more that the university offered...
courses that I otherwise would not find at my current university, so that is the main academic reason why I chose UTAS” (23).

As outlined in Table 29 below, a similar picture was found among the survey respondents who reported that the ‘location of host university’ (mean score=3.86) and ‘the range and quality of university courses available’ (mean=3.76) offered was more influential than most other academic/institutional factors. As in the interview group, lower study fees was the least influential factor in respondents’ selection of their host university.

Table 29: Academic factors influential in survey respondents’ selection of host university, N=194

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors influential:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location of host university</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range and quality of university courses available</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing exchange program</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and services offered for international students</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA semester time compatible with home semester</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of courses not available in home degree</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of application process</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower costs of study fees than at other universities</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert scale: 1=‘Strongly disagree’ to 5=‘Strongly agree’

These factors are examined in more detail throughout the rest of this chapter.
6.4.3 Location and facilities of host university

Location factors were stated as highly important throughout the search process to find a suitable host university by most students in both samples. Most interviewees (55%) said that they decided on the city/area where they wanted to study first. For example, one interviewee specifically chose her university because of the environment surrounding as the university is “so close to the Great Barrier Reef and there is lots to do around this area” (1), and another said that “I only looked at universities which are close to the beach” (9). The interviewees who preferred to study in a metropolitan city usually searched for host institutions in Sydney, Melbourne and/or Brisbane first and compared factors important to them in several universities before making a final decision on their host university. In this search stage, institutional pull factors such as where in the city the university was, the size of the university and/or the facilities of the university campus became important.

Furthermore, the levels of service and support offered by the host university were also influential in some students’ choices of university, while others were attracted by the facilities of their host university. One interviewee said that while the courses offered and the compatible semester times were important in her decision, it was also important that her “host university offered a good support system for international students and that the campus was not too far away from the city” (3). For another interviewee academic and institutional factors were not really important – it was more about “the flair of the city” but also the less expensive study/living fees and the compatibility of the semester times (2). That the city and the university itself were “not too big and overwhelming” (11) was important for one interviewee, whereas another student felt attracted to the opposite and selected her university because “it was large and in a big city” (5). These factors exerted a moderate pulling effect, however they need to be seen in combination with other institutional pull factors such as the variety of courses offered which influenced students’ final host university selection more significantly.

Similarly, the ‘location of host university’ was reported as the most influential factor for survey respondents in their choice of host university, with a mean of 3.86 (see
Factors influencing key stages of decision-making

Table 29 above). Further, ‘facilities and services offered for international students’ at the host university’ was also reported as an influential factor by most respondents, attaining a mean of 3.18. The location of host university was considered as important by the majority of students when selecting their host university. However, location factors such as wanting to study in a small or large city or university varied among interviewees depending on their personal preferences.

6.4.4 Recognition of courses

European students in the interview group (66%) stated that it was important to them that courses undertaken abroad would be later recognised by their home university. Interestingly, however, only 55% of the interviewees had final assurance from their home university prior to their abroad semester that all course credits received in Australia would be transferable. This was the case for most but not all students on exchange programs and some free-mover students. Many of the other interviewees were concerned about the possibility of not being able to transfer all course credits achieved in Australia to their home degree. For example, one interviewee said: “I really, really hope that all my classes will be approved here in Copenhagen ... otherwise I am in trouble ... they want to approve it, but of course I do not have a guarantee that they will. I am really, really crossing my fingers that they will because otherwise I do not get my points and then this delay my whole education” (10).

Another challenge stated by some interviewees was having to deal with the uncertainty of the pre-selected courses, which were only finally approved once the students started their semester at their host university. One student mentioned “I had to apply for eight courses but I have no idea which four courses I will finally undertake, I do not really understand how the systems works over there” (2). This is a practical issue that host institutions should be aware of and they should advise students better regarding issues of course selection.

Similarly, around two-thirds of survey respondents (62%) also reported that ‘to get all Australian course credits recognised at their home university’ was important in their decision-making (mean=3.68). However, that the recognition of credits was not
important for the other European students highlighted again that the study component of the study abroad experience itself was only one, and not necessarily an important one, in the overall aspect of decision to participate in a study abroad semester in Australia. In summary, while the recognition of courses by the home institution was important to the respondents, to improve English skills and to broaden their academic experience and horizon in general was considered more important.

6.4.5 Other institutional factors

Most interviewees mentioned the importance of not losing a semester in their home degree while studying abroad. In particular, five interviewees who considered several universities in Australia as suitable finally selected their host university over other eligible universities because the semester dates between their home and host university were aligned. While a variety of academic and institutional factors were influential in their choice of host university, it was also very important to them not to lose a semester in their home degree programs. Therefore, these students’ final selection of their host universities was based on compatible semester times. For example, one exchange student mentioned that he had two university choices in Australia but only one of them had “a tri-semester program and therefore was time wise compatible” with his degree program at home (15). A free-mover student searched for a less expensive study program in Australia than at the private Bond University but in the end it was “most important that the semester time and the course program were compatible” with her home degree (16).

In the survey group, almost half of the survey respondents (45%) reported that ‘semester time was compatible with their home semester’ was influential in their selection of their host university. The application process at a host university was reported to be an important or influential factor in the selection of the host institution by around 20% of survey respondents.
6.4.6 Discussion of key findings on host institutional factors

As discussed earlier, most European students wanted to broaden their academic experience while studying abroad. Therefore, selecting a host country and university known for good quality in higher education was deemed important, although academic and institutional factors were less important than location and travel destination factors when selecting Australia as their study destination. The location of the host institution and the range and quality of courses offered were considered the most important factors when students selected their Australian institution. Teichler (2004b) also suggested in his study that there is a tendency among ERASMUS credit mobile students to choose very different courses abroad to those at home in order to broaden their academic horizons and to get to know new areas of their study field. However, in this study, most of the students participating in an exchange program stated that they had had no choice in their host institution selection, and therefore identified an ‘existing exchange program’ as an important criterion in the selection of a host university. While it was also found in Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe’s (2008) study that credit mobile students reported the existing ‘exchange partnership’ with Australia as an important precondition, they also considered ‘gaining course credits’ and ‘service provided for exchange students by the university’ to be essential attributes of their host university.

Furthermore, compatible semester times between home and host universities, and recognition of study credits achieved abroad at their home university, were also important to most European students in this study. Easy course application and visa processes, and study fees had almost no influence on the choice of host country and university. In Teichler’s (2004) study it was also found that the ability to gain credit for courses completed at the host university was vital for most temporary mobile students and that ERASMUS students often chose different courses when studying abroad compared to those they studied at home.

In contrast, while temporarily mobile students are more focused on the attractive attributes of the country, degree mobile students are more likely to be influenced by educational factors such as the reputation, quality and study costs of institutions as
well as the international recognition of qualifications (Hobsons EMEA 2014; QS World University 2014; Woodfield 2010).

6.5 The final decision

Once prospective international students have selected a suitable host country and institution (or more than one) they will submit an application. If students applied at more than one institution and receive an offer of admission from several institutions they will make trade-offs between the host country and institutional pull factors considered in the search stage (Chen, L-H 2007). The final stage of the decision-making process is complete when the student accepts one offer of admission at a host institution.

For the interviewees who stated Australia was their first choice of study abroad country, the stages of their decision-making were more or less sequential, and they followed each of the four steps in turn. First, these students decided to study abroad in general, then selected Australia as their preferred study abroad destination. Most interviewees then searched for a number of suitable host institutions in the cities they were interested in living before they submitted an application at their preferred host institution(s). Once their application was accepted they took the offer of admission and the decision was finalised. However, two interviewees applied to two universities at the same time and both accepted the first offer of admission they received.

For the five interviewees (17%) and 28 survey respondents (14%) who stated Australia was not their first choice of host country the situation was slightly different. The preferred study abroad destinations of these students, and why they finally selected Australia, were examined in Section 5.2.3. While most of these students reported that they were not successful in their application to obtain an exchange place, two students stated the application process was too complicated in the US or too slow in New Zealand, turning them away from these countries. As outlined earlier, these findings demonstrate the importance of the application process in
contributing to a positive student experience, which in turn can influence the student’s final decision of where to study.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed research objectives one and two. In doing so, the steps that the students undertook in their decision-making were outlined, their motivations and also which destination and institutional factors mattered most in students’ decisions to study abroad in Australia, and to select their host institution, were examined and discussed. This chapter also examined and discussed the extent to which the desire to travel and explore tourist attractions was a motivator for students to choose Australia as their study destination.

The conceptual framework for this study was designed not only to identify the general destination and institutional factors that pushed/pulled European students to study in Australia and select a particular host institution, but also to focus on the individual context of their decision-making. The push and pull theory, combined with the CDM theory offered a structured way to summarise which destination and institutional factors were most important.

The decision-making processes of students who decide to study abroad are shaped by a combination of motivations, knowledge and personal preferences. They are also often influenced by recommendations from reference groups. The process can be influenced by external forces such as academic, economic and socio-cultural factors within students’ home countries. It can also be influenced by a variety of factors related to the host destination and institution. European students usually followed four stages in their decision-making process and these stages appeared to be interconnected and often overlapped.

At the predisposition stage, it was found that students were most strongly motivated by a desire to travel and an interest in experiencing other cultures, but also to grow their personal and professional skills, and particularly to develop linguistic, academic
Factors influencing key stages of decision-making

and social skills. These motivations were even more strongly expressed when the students explained why they selected Australia as a study abroad destination.

At the destination stage of the process, a key finding was that European students considered country-related pull factors more important than academic- or economic-pull factors. By reviewing the most important and influential country and institution factors, the research findings indicate that the country pull factors of Australia had the strongest influence, followed by the pull factors related to the host institution. In particular, tourism-/travel-related opportunities were a strong attraction and a highly important motivational factor. The combination of Australia’s climate, natural beauty and unique flora and fauna were the most significant location factors. Together with the opportunity to improve English language skills and to experience a different culture, lifestyle and environment in relative safety and security, these factors were a strong drawcard for students choosing to embark on a semester in a country on the other side of the world. Furthermore, to escape a European winter and have the opportunity to live in a warm and sunny climate close to the beach, and also to study far from home rather than seeking a better educational experience, were also highly important in students’ decision-making. Although most students were aware of the high living costs in Australia, economic factors were not important in their decision-making processes. This may be due to the many opportunities for government funding available to European students.

Very few studies have investigated what specifically influences temporary study abroad students in their choice of host institution. This study found that European students perceived Australian tertiary institutions as being of comparable quality to their home institutions. However, a significant key finding is that academic and institutional factors were less important than location and travel factors the selection of a host country. Nevertheless, university location and the range and quality of courses available became more important in students’ selection of their host university. The results also suggest that students’ choices of host city and host institution were not separated; rather, students had a number of favourite host cities and searched for a number of suitable institutions in those cities before they made a final choice. Another issue for some students was the differences in the academic
calendars of their home and host institutions. In some cases compatible semester times were the critical factor in students’ final preference for a particular host institution. The recognition of study credits achieved abroad at their home university was an issue of concern for most students when selecting their host institution, and some students still faced uncertainty about credit recognition shortly before commencing their semester in Australia.

In light of this previous point, there is probably a potential for the home and host institutions to resolve some of the problems around credit recognition. Based on the results of this study, it became apparent that Australian universities cannot rely only on their academic reputation if they want to attract European students to participate in temporary study abroad programs. Instead, the country-related pull factors and the positive image of Australia in the minds of these students really set Australia apart from other countries that also offered high quality education delivered in English.

To date, the push-pull theory and CDM theory have primarily been used in the literature to explain international students’ decision-making in the destination and institution selection stages. Furthermore, most of these studies have focused on degree students rather than temporary international students. This study contributes to developing the literature in this area through employing the push-pull theory and CDM theory to understand European students’ selection of their temporary study abroad destinations at all four stages of the decision-making process. Table 30 below provides a summary of the highly important push and facilitating factors in students’ home countries, and the strengths of the pull factors of Australia and Australian tertiary institutions which were most significant in European students’ decision-making processes.

In the next chapter, the results of the qualitative research (post-SA interview) and the quantitative research (survey) in regards students’ expectations and experiences of the overall Australian sojourn are examined and discussed.
Table 30: Important decision-making factors to select host country and institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of decision-making</th>
<th>Factors important in decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predisposition Stage</td>
<td>• No focus on destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Motivations to SA most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Stage</td>
<td>• Destination pull factors (Image, geographic location, climate &amp; environment of Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Country Factors</td>
<td>• Academic factors (Quality of education, reputation, EMIs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Australia offers:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Travel opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Beach/outdoor lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Real’ SA experience far from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Stage</td>
<td>• Location of host institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Institutional &amp; City Factors</td>
<td>• Quality &amp; wide range of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Existing exchange program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Service for IS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Location of host city (personal preferences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Stage</td>
<td>• Compatible semester times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Acceptance of first offer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 Living, study and travel: Expectations versus actual experiences

7.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes to addressing research objective three: To explore the extent to which European students’ expectations of life, study and travel in Australia are being met. This study also seeks to better understand European students’ recreational travel and tourism behaviours while studying in Australia. In doing so, it addresses the following research questions:

- What were students’ living, study and travel expectations, and experiences of their Australian sojourn?
- What recreational tourism or travel-related activities did they undertake in Australia?
- What knowledge would students have liked to have received before departing to Australia?

This holistic study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the decision-making processes of European students temporarily studying abroad in Australia, and to shine a light on students’ most important expectations and experiences while living, studying and travelling in Australia. This chapter first examines students’ overall living and study experiences in Australia, and the extent to which these experiences have met their expectations is explored. Information that the students felt they would have liked to receive prior to commencing their study semester in Australia is discussed throughout the chapter. It was discussed in Section 2.4 that international students contribute extensively to the tourism industry in Australia and that there is a need to gain greater insights into the travel behaviour of European international students in Australia. Therefore, students’ motivations for taking part in recreational leisure, travel and tourism activities, and the actual activities that they
undertook in Australia, including their travel behaviours, are examined and discussed. Finally, the chapter identifies the most important benefits the students gained from their Australian sojourns.

This chapter is structured in the same way as the two previous chapters. The findings of the interviews and survey are presented first, and a discussion of the results is provided at the end of each section.

7.2 Experiencing daily life in Australia

When students were asked in the pre-SA interview about their expectations of their Australian sojourns, most interviewees placed living and travel experiences as equally or more important than the studying. For example, although fulfilling the study requirements abroad was important to these interviewees they also expected to have “a great time in Australia and to get a bit of distance from the hectic life and pressure at home... to experience the Australian culture” (2); “a good and fun time, to meet many people and to find new friends ... and to see a lot of the country” (4); and “to have a fun time in Australia with lots of experiences, impressions and attitudes to take home” (3). As these quotes demonstrate, the experience of living in Australia, and not just the academic experience, was highly important to students. While students had a variety of expectations for their daily life in Australia, the most common were related to socio-cultural and English language experiences, and enjoyment of the warmer climate and outdoor lifestyle. These expectations were significant motivating factors behind the students’ desire to study in Australia and were considered to be the most important benefits of their overall Australian sojourn. These benefits are further explained in Section 7.5.

7.2.1 Living far from home

Interviewees were encouraged to talk about their experiences of living far from home and of the lifestyle in Australia. Almost two-thirds of the interviewees agreed in the pre-SA interview that their image of Australia influenced their decisions to study
there (see Section 6.3.2), so it was therefore of interest to examine whether their
general perceptions of Australia had changed after living there.

Most interviewees (86%) stated that they had enjoyed living so far away and liked
not being able to go home for visits. For example, one interviewee said: “I enjoyed
being far away, I enjoyed being somewhere else... it was my first time in the Southern
hemisphere, it was really good” (5), and another interviewee said: “I wanted to go to
a country that is far away from my home country because I did not want to have the
feeling that I could always go home if something goes wrong... and actually it was
good, so I felt very confident when I came back” (14). Four other interviewees (14%)
pointed out that although it was difficult in the beginning, it was good to study so far
from home. One of these interviewees said: “At the beginning I was really homesick
... but I met so many people and we did so many things and now I do not even feel like
going home” (4). These interviewees reflected that not being able to go home during
their semester made them feel more independent, and the experience contributed
to their personal development.

The positive image most interviewees had of Australia prior to studying there was
confirmed by their experiences. For example, interviewees commented that “I had
this image that Australians are outgoing and friendly and that was right” (14), and
“To be honest, before I actually travelled to Australia it was always a dream to go
there... and right now, it was totally up to my expectations and I think I actually fell
more in love with the people and the country, more than I ever felt before” (23).
Another interviewee had a clear image of the landscape of Australia being “beautiful,
different and very various” and that said that this “really has been confirmed” (16). In
particular the images of Australia as a sunny country with a relaxed lifestyle was
confirmed by interviewees’ experiences. For example, one interviewee said: “I
expected that it is warm and nice, so the common stereotypes, but they were fulfilled
and it is even better. I would say that was one of my best experiences of my life... so
it was substantially better” (15). It was also previously reported in Section 6.3.2 that
interviewees perceived Australia to be a safe country to live, study and travel in. All
interviewees stated that the image of Australia as a safe study destination was
confirmed by their experiences.
To experience the more relaxed lifestyle in Australia was identified by all interviewees as very enjoyable and many of them added that they found Australian people to be very friendly and easy-going. One interviewee said, for example, that “People are really friendly and really nice in Australia. That is the stereotype but that is just what it is like” (29). The outdoor lifestyle in Australia was, in particular cited by eight interviewees to be most enjoyable. Interviewees said that “I really, really like the Australian lifestyle. People are really friendly, really relaxed and nice. And there is so much going on outside... people spend so much time outside” (4), and that the Australian lifestyle is “awesome! I think that is the best thing in Australia, the lifestyle and the relaxed atmosphere and everything outside... I think that it is – that is Australia” (9). Another interviewee stated: “I really liked the lifestyle... how active people were... how much you actually went out in the nature and always were in contact with nature” (23).

To experience the warm weather and the beach lifestyle was identified by eight interviewees as their favourite part of their Australian sojourn. For example, interviewees commented how enjoyable it was to “stay in an apartment on the beach ... to have a surfboard and with all the people together ... just this lifestyle we had there” (9) and “be able to go to the pool or to the beach ... living in this context was very good” (19). The overall living experience was described as very positive by interviewees and most of their pre-SA expectations in regards living in Australia were fulfilled. The positive attitudes towards the outdoor and beach lifestyle that Australia has to offer cannot be underestimated. Enjoying the lifestyle was the highlight of their study abroad experience for most interviewees. Therefore, there is an opportunity here for the marketing of study abroad in Australia to focus on the lifestyle aspects of Australia.

The results from the survey group show that overall respondents expected to experience greater difficulties prior to coming to Australia than those they recalled actually experiencing in Australia. Indeed, Table 31 below shows that the students experienced fewer difficulties than they had anticipated. As the low means indicate, most survey respondents did not experience any substantial or even moderate difficulties in adapting to their life in Australia, in dealing with a new environment.
and a different climate, or in understanding ethnic and cultural differences in Australia. The main concern before arriving in Australia for over half of survey respondents was finding accommodation in their host city, and as a mean of 2.56 demonstrates, some of the students did experience difficulties in this area.

Table 31: Survey respondents imagining and experiencing difficulties during Australian sojourn (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Anticipated difficulties (before SA in Australia)</th>
<th>Experienced difficulties (during stay in Australia)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To find a place to live</td>
<td>Mean1=3.20 SD=1.05</td>
<td>Mean1=2.56 SD=1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get around in a new environment</td>
<td>Mean1=2.55 SD=1.08</td>
<td>Mean1=2.08 SD=.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To adapt to a new lifestyle</td>
<td>Mean1=2.44 SD=1.12</td>
<td>Mean1=2.07 SD=1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand ethnic and cultural differences in Australia</td>
<td>Mean1=2.34 SD=.88</td>
<td>Mean1=2.14 SD=.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To deal with the climate</td>
<td>Mean1=2.07 SD=1.05</td>
<td>Mean1=1.82 SD=.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1='Strongly disagree' to 5='Strongly agree'

Eleven survey respondents (6%) elaborated on the accommodation issue in the open-ended questions. They stated that it was not easy to find a place to live, and they found accommodation very expensive. These students reported that they would have appreciated receiving better information about this prior to coming to Australia, and would have liked greater assistance in finding affordable accommodation. For example, one respondent wished he would have known how “bad the Unilodge deal is and how to find good and affordable accommodation safely from home”. This is a key issue that hosting institutions need to be aware of, and it appears that better assistance in finding accommodation is needed in order to encourage a more positive experience for students.

7.2.2 The importance of socio-cultural and linguistic experiences

The socio-cultural experience

Socio-cultural experiences were highly important to the students. In the context of the reported expectations of their socio-cultural experiences in Australia most
interviewees echoed in similar ways the statement of this interviewee who said: “I just hope I will have a really good time that involves meeting a lot of people, opening my horizon, experiencing a different culture and seeing cultural things” (10).

Overall, interviewees’ expectations of learning about other cultures, meeting many new people and having a good time socially in Australia were fulfilled. Seven interviewees (24%) made similar comments to an interviewee who said she “did not really want to expect too much ... just wanted to go and see what happened” and that the experience of the Australian culture and lifestyle “was even better” than expected (14). Another interviewee commented: “I did not know so much before going there... but I went there with a little bit of European arrogance, you know like they do not have culture there, they do not have a rich history or this kind of bullshit. And instead I fell in love with the culture” (24). While all interviewees agreed that they learnt a lot about the Australian culture and also about other cultures, one interviewee commented that “I would not say that the Australian culture is so different to our culture ... I learnt more about Asian culture” (13). Similarly, three other interviewees did not expect to find so many ‘different cultures and international people’ in Sydney but rather expected to meet ‘more real Australians’ (20, 21, 22). Furthermore, many interviewees pointed out that meeting people from all over the world and establishing new friendships was “definitely one of the best things” (6) about their Australian sojourn. However, most interviewees were slightly disappointed that they did not spend more quality time with Australians. This will be further examined in the next section.

Another important aspect of the socio-cultural experience was for students to improve their English language skills. To improve English skills was also stated as one of the highest motivations, and was perceived as a highly important benefit of studying abroad in Australia. Most interviewees stated that they speak, besides English, at least one language other than their mother tongue, but to further improve their English skills was a priority. While 26 interviewees (90%) felt that their study abroad experience slightly improved their English, most of these interviewees were somewhat disappointed at not improving their English skills as much as they had expected. For example, two German interviewees said that they “met so many other
Germans while studying in Australia” that they often spoke German instead of English, “unfortunately I had many German friends [in Australia] to whom I talked in German quite frequently” (4). An Italian student said that her English writing rather than her speaking skills improved as she “was talking more to international students than to Australians” (28).

Although the survey respondents were reporting on their Australian sojourn expectations a considerable time after they had returned home, the picture regarding overall expectations was similar to the interviewees. In fact, and as shown in Table 32 below, with a mean of 4.38, ‘to improve English language skills’ was reported by survey respondents as the highest of all expectations. However, slightly fewer survey respondents reported that they improved their English skills.

Table 32: Expectations and experiences of the Australian sojourn, Survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things to occur during Australian sojourn</th>
<th>Expectations before coming to Australia</th>
<th>Experiences during stay in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean¹</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve English skills</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet Australian people</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about a new culture and lifestyle</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1='Strongly disagree' to 5='Strongly agree'

Similarly, with a mean of over 4, respondents also reported high expectations regarding ‘to learn about a new culture and lifestyle’ and ‘to meet Australian people’. While the first of these expectations was met the latter was not so much. The lower mean of 3.61 indicates that students’ high expectations of meeting Australian people were often not fulfilled.

Despite students not interacting with Australians as much as they had anticipated, 20 of the 194 respondents took the opportunity to comment in the open-ended questions about how friendly, welcoming and open-minded they found Australians to be. Comments such as “Australians are probably the friendliest and most helpful people I have ever met and it is just an amazing country to study, work and travel in”, “Australia and its people definitely helped me to feel comfortable and welcome” were common sentiments among these survey respondents.
Interestingly, although students experienced Australian people as being friendly and open-minded, their high pre-trip expectations of meeting many Australians and becoming friends with Australians were often unfulfilled. Looking more closely at these findings, they do not mean that students did not meet many Australians, but rather that Europeans have a different understanding of meeting people. For example, most Europeans consider meeting people as not only having a bit of ‘small talk’, such as a superficial conversation about the weather, which the students most likely all had. It is more understood as getting to know people and having ‘real’, more meaningful interactions with them as the quote of this interviewee described her experience with Australians inside- and outside of university demonstrates: “I think it was more difficult than I thought... my picture was that they are easier to get along with...they are easy-going, but then it is all chatting and partying... but not like the German meaning of friendship” (5).

It is acknowledged that these findings are likely to be influenced by the timing of the survey and interviews, and this may account for why the interviewees stated that their expectations about learning about a new culture while studying in Australia were surpassed by their experiences.

7.2.3 High cost of living

Aside from all of the positive experiences, all interviewees stated in their post-SA interviews, that living in Australia was more expensive than expected. This was partly due to the fact that the Euro–Dollar exchange rate was weaker than expected. Many interviewees echoed the following comment: “I heard before that it is really expensive [in Australia] but you just believe it when you see it in the supermarket ... I really just realised it when I was there” (3). However, only 12 interviewees (41%) stated that higher than expected costs restricted their travel plans in Australia. For example, three Danish interviewees who studied together in Sydney spent almost twice the money they had planned to on living costs. Unfortunately, this impacted on their travel plans. One of them commented: “We wanted to travel on the east coast but the money just slipped away, so we did not have the money in the end” (20). Eight
Interviewees (27%) not only raised financial issues as their least favourite part of their Australia sojourn but also stated that if they had known how expensive it really is to live in Australia they would have saved more money beforehand.

Similarly to the interviewees, a high mean of 3.49 indicates that over half of the survey respondents were aware of the high living costs in Australia and they expected to face difficulties financing their living and travel costs. As demonstrated in Table 33 below, even more survey respondents actually experienced financial difficulties during their Australian sojourn. A lower mean of 2.92 demonstrates that fewer students were concerned about financing their study fees, which is plausible as the majority received financial support from home. However, around a third of survey respondents reported that they experienced difficulties in financing their study costs in Australia.

Table 33: Survey respondents imagining of and experiencing financial difficulties (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Anticipated difficulties (before SA in Australia)</th>
<th>Experienced difficulties (during stay in Australia)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean¹</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To finance living and travel costs</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To finance study costs</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1='Strongly disagree' to 5='Strongly agree'

In addition, in the open-ended section of the survey, 21% of the 194 respondents commented that they wished they had had more knowledge about the high cost of living in Australia. For example, one respondent stated it would have been good to know “How expensive everything really is, so you can make a more realistic budget before going to Australia”.

It was found that most of the interviewees, and around a quarter of survey respondents, acknowledged that they wished they had had better general information about living in Australia, and in particular about finding accommodation and the high living costs. Problems related to accommodation, or transport, were also stated by some students as their least favourite part of living in Australia. However, while universities cannot do anything about higher living costs related to a changing exchange rate, it was found that precise information provided by educational advisers prior to their semester abroad is most appreciated by the students. For
example, information given about prices in Australia tended to understate the problem which did upset students once they arrived in Australia.

7.2.4 Discussion of key findings relating to living experiences

The findings suggest that European students had few problems adapting to their new life when studying abroad in Australia. Overall, most students found it easy to adapt to the Australian culture and perceived the lifestyle in Australia and living far from home as an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The interviewees revealed that the students found the Australian culture to be different enough from the culture of their European home country for them to be excited about experiencing it, but in many respects they also found the culture similar enough to easily adjust to it and did not experience ‘culture shock’. Similarly, a study of exchange students from Australia and New Zealand studying in Canada found that cultural similarities between home and host countries influenced in a positive way their ability to adjust to their new environment when studying abroad (Daly 2007).

This current study also found that the reality of living in Australia lived up to most students’ expectations. This indicates that the attributes of Australia satisfied students’ expectations and needs. Likewise, a study by Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe (2008) that focused on the experiences of exchange students in Australia also found that over 95% of these students, predominantly from North America and Europe, were satisfied with the overall living experiences in Australia. However, while most European students had expectations of meeting many Australians, and of meeting people from all over the world, almost half were rather disappointed that they did not have more substantial interactions with Australians. Nevertheless, the students had very positive experiences regarding meeting people from all over the world.

This study found that the students’ motivations and expectations about study abroad and their selection of Australia as their study destination, were interrelated. For example, the students were highly driven by motivations such as the desire to experience a new culture, to meet many new people, and to improve their English
skills, and they also had high expectations of experiencing and achieving these things. These finding related to socio-cultural and linguistic expectations and experiences were previously discussed in detail throughout Chapter 6. Therefore, they are not discussed again here.

It was also found that any difficulties European students experienced in Australia were mostly related to financial matters, and in some cases to finding affordable accommodation and to public transport issues. Students who experienced these difficulties stated that they would have appreciated receiving better information about these issues prior to coming to Australia, and would have liked greater assistance in finding affordable accommodation. This finding is in line with other studies which also report that financial problems, and problems related to accommodation, were the most difficult issues for students to cope with during their study semesters abroad (Krzaklewska & Krupnik 2006; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; Teichler 2004a; Van Hoof & Verbeeten 2005).

7.3 Studying in Australia

Prior to studying in Australia, most interviewees said that they were not placing too much emphasis on their classes but instead, they were more focused on the overall experience of studying abroad. The opportunity to live and travel abroad was just as, if not more important than, their study experience. However, students’ expectations of their host universities were still high. The students argued that as they paid much higher study fees in Australia compared to home, they automatically expected a high level of teaching and service. I was therefore interested to find out if interviewees’ expectations of the teaching quality, academic support and services supplied at their host university were fulfilled. Survey respondents were asked to report if they expected and experienced any difficulties in fulfilling the study requirements at their Australian university. Some respondents also referred to their academic experiences in greater detail in the open-ended survey questions. These comments are integrated with the interview findings.
7.3.1 The crucial start of the study abroad semester

Most interviewees (93%) received comprehensive information during their orientation session and felt very welcomed by their host university. Orientation events varied across universities from one orientation day to two orientation weeks, but most interviewees (59%) had one orientation week.

Three interviewees missed the orientation event at their host university due to their different semester times back home. While one of these interviewees received important information during an extra 1.5 day orientation session for latecomers, two other interviewees were left rather confused when they arrived at their host university. Although one student was told by her agency in Germany that she would receive all the information she needed at the international office when she arrived, that was not the case at all: “I had a really hard beginning ... and I was really disappointed with the international office, because in the beginning I did not get help from them. They just gave me lots of papers to read and if I would have read it the semester would have been gone. My housemate showed me everything – without her I would have been completely lost” (1). Another interviewee who booked the airport-pickup and university accommodation on campus upfront had to wait six hours at the airport before she was picked up. She said: “At first, I did not really feel welcome ... because I arrived in the morning and there was nobody to welcome me and they just put me into a really small room in a flat with people I never met ... so, I felt really sad at first” (4). Without her flatmates who “were really nice and helped me a lot” she would have felt totally lost. She also pointed out that she would have appreciated “more help and more information” in the beginning as the two-hour information session on her first day at university provided only very general information and left her “still confused”. These two interviewees stated that they were not satisfied with the access to the student support service and this was due to the fact that they did not receive substantial information or support in the beginning of their semesters.

This interview finding suggests that the more comprehensive the orientation at the beginning of students’ semester abroad is, the more likely they are to be satisfied
with their study abroad semester. However, this was not specifically tested in this study.

7.3.2 The overall study experience

The prospect of facing academic difficulties while studying in Australia was not a concern for most interviewees. Rather, interviewees were excited and confident about their upcoming study abroad semester. However, 11 interviewees (38%) expressed small concerns that were mainly related to English language difficulties; understanding the different academic system at their host university; and keeping up with the academic workload. Therefore, a number of these interviewees had similar expectations to the student who was hoping “to get a little bit extra support in regards to my English abilities” and “to find smaller classes with more direct contact and interaction between students and lecturers” (9).

Most interviewees (86%) were content with the quality of their courses and satisfied with their study results. However, four interviewees dropped one of their courses at the beginning of their semesters as the workload at university was too much. One interviewee was very disappointed that one of her courses was delivered as an online-course – something which she was not aware of beforehand. She described it as unfair that it was impossible to change the course as it should never have been “recommended to international students” (8). Around a third of the interviewees stated that they wished they had had better study- and course-related information prior to selecting their host university and courses.

The academic support from their lecturers or other academic and administrative staff was appreciated and utilised by most interviewees. Only a few students were disappointed that no academic support was offered although some of them did not ask for help. However, one interviewee said: “I had some problems with my essay questions and tried to get hold of my lecturer but it was not possible” (13). Two other interviewees were used to being taught in small groups and receiving continual advice from their lecturers back at their home university and were disappointed that in Australia they were, for example, “just one of 500 uni students and they treated
me like that. So if you had any questions it was just like just get your things together, you are a good student, just do it” (29). Most interviewees (62%) were aware that English language support was available at their host university but only 34% utilised the support service given by an academic skills unit or their lecturers. Only one interviewee was disappointed that her host university did not offer any English support classes.

The physical environment of the campus

The quality of courses and teaching was stated as being more important than the physical environment of the host university campus by most interviewees. However, they expected that facilities at their host university, particularly the library and IT suites, would be similar to their universities back home.

While most interviewees (79%) experienced good quality facilities at their host university, interviewees were particularly appreciative when “the library had really nice opening hours” (17). In contrast, six students were disappointed about the facilities at their host campus. For example, four interviewees studying at the same institution in Sydney stated in similar ways that the “library was pretty small’, “the access to the internet was so bad”, and that they “just did not have internet sometimes in the peak hours when everyone needed it” (3, 20, 21, 22). Another interviewee mentioned that the free access to the internet was very limited and given the high study fees she was irritated that “you have to pay for the internet” to check private emails. She would have appreciated it if her host university had “mentioned that earlier, because I spent like $250 extra on internet” (4). Another interviewee said the computer labs were “not up to date”, there were “not enough computers for everyone” and found the “library a bit confusing” (8). It is clear that these students expected good university facilities and did not anticipate experiencing barriers to studying such as limited library and computer lab hours or extra costs for internet. These are practical issues that host institutions should be aware of and students should receive better information about them.

It was apparent during the interviews that not many students had specific knowledge about the locations of their host institution before they arrived in Australia, and for
some interviewees the location of their host institution was a disappointment. For example, while the four students studying at the same university at the Gold Coast were all impressed by the campus environment of their host university, they thought that places of interest such as the beach and the shops would have been closer and that it would have been easier to get around. One interviewee said: “I think I had very high expectations... and the time at uni was maybe not up to them... mainly because of the environment. I think what was different was living on the Gold Coast... that was not what I expected at all. It was lots of concrete and things... and I expected more wilderness, so that was not in line with what I expected” (18).

The results in the survey group revealed that more students expected to experience greater difficulties in ‘fulfilling all study requirements at the host university’ prior to coming to Australia (mean=2.87) compared to the difficulties they recalled actually experiencing in Australia. Overall, the low mean of 2.30 suggests that not many survey respondents experienced difficulties in fulfilling their study requirements.

Within the survey group 36 survey respondents (19%) shared their views of their academic experiences at their host university in the open-ended questions. Thirteen respondents appreciated the different, good and/or interesting Australian study system or the quality of their courses. For example, one respondent stated ‘I learnt so much from my studies, the quality of the education was great. Australia is a safe, exciting and relaxed country – perfect for a semester abroad’. However, six respondents faced some difficulties at their host university, for example having problems with “extremely different grading of work between lecturers”, or “the high workload”. Six other respondents stated that they were disappointed “with the academic learnings”; “with the university itself”, or the “average quality but still extremely expensive university”. Eleven respondents stated that they would have appreciated having more knowledge regarding academic issues at their host university. For example, survey respondents reported that they were unaware of the ‘heavy workload of their study program’ or wished they would have chosen their ‘courses better or had more information about their host university in general prior their departure’.
Altogether, as the findings above revealed, most students were satisfied with their overall study experience. However, as discussed above, some of the students stated that their expectations of the content of their courses and university facilities such as the library and IT facilities were not met. These students would have liked to have more accurate information about their courses of study and the campus facilities. The students would have appreciated having more options for and access to academic services, even though they did not use them regularly.

### 7.3.3 Students’ interactions within host university

In general, the European students described meeting other international students as being easy and that they mostly interacted with other international students during their university life. However, some interviewees felt there were too many international students in their courses. Furthermore, around a third of the interviewees found interacting with Australian students slightly difficult.

#### 7.3.3.1 Diversity of students at host university

Around half of the interviewees stated in their pre-SA interviews that they had mixed feelings about the high number of international students at Australian universities, as this comment indicates: “it is easy to get in touch with international students ... because they understand you because it is a new country and everything ... but sometimes it can be, maybe difficult, because you cannot see the real culture of the country if you stay too much with international students” (19).

Over half of the interviewees (59%) considered the mix between national (Australian) and international students at their host university was good. However, 12 of these 17 interviewees mentioned that although there was a good mix there were many international, particularly many Asian students. For example, one interviewee stated: “I think it was a lot of Asian cultures ... most of the international students were from Asia, but I think it was a good mixture in the end because we were people from all over the world” (22). Another three students pointed out that there were many
international students at their university but not in their courses. For example, one interviewee said: “they had lots of international students, on campus there were so many Asians, especially Chinese people, someone said they outnumbered the Australian people ... but I actually liked it, it was so nice to have so many different cultures around and I would say, most of the students I studied with were Australians” (4).

In contrast, eight interviewees (28%) felt there were too many international students on their courses. These interviewees pointed out that “I had some courses were we were all international students, so not even one Australian among 30 people, so that was a bit strange” (6) and “I feel a bit strange saying that since I am a foreign student myself but I felt in some classes there were too many international students and I came to Australia to improve my English and then you sit in classes with people which you cannot even have a conversation with because their English is so limited ... so I do not understand why the university does that, especially considering it is a postgraduate program ... it is a bit difficult ... and I really would have liked more Australians and I felt that the university just takes them all in ... everyone for the money they pay” (8). Similarly, other interviewees brought up that there were “mainly Asians ... only two Australians in my courses” and that they found it difficult as the “level of language is so low, and culture wise they do not talk so much” (15) and “they did not want to speak during our tutorials” (7). The other four interviewees (14%) did not elaborate on this issue.

Implications from these quotes are that some of these European students were disappointed as they had an expectation that there would be more, what they considered as ‘real Australian students’, in their classes.

7.3.3.2 Interactions with Australian students

Some interviewees talked enthusiastically about their interactions with Australian students. For example, one said: “I had some really good experiences with national students who really welcomed me and wanted to hear all about my country and where I came from and were extremely welcoming” (10). However, while 59% of
interviewees pointed out that although they experienced good communication between Australian and international students, it was often less than they were expecting. These interviewees reflected in similar ways that “I felt they were friendly and like they chatted in class a bit but it never went further … it would have been great to get more in contact with Australian students” (8), and they did not feel that “the Australians were too interested in really going to know all international students because there are too many” (5) and that “the international students and then the Australian students were a group of themselves, so it was hard to get in contact with them” (12). Nevertheless, most of these students were still satisfied with the interactions they had with Australians in their courses.

However, of the remaining interviewees 21% were rather disappointed about the communication with Australian students. For example, interviewees commented that “there was no interaction … no Australians in our student group” (3), “it was hard to get to know them [Australian students]” (9), and “I only had little contact to Australian students … there is not a lot of interaction” (11).

In general, interviewees acknowledged understanding why Australian students might be somewhat uninterested in establishing deeper relationships with international students who leave again after one semester. They also thought that the high number of international students might be overwhelming for Australian students. As one interviewee argued “I did not feel the Australians were too interested in really, really getting to know the international students because there are so many, and yeah they just coming and going” (5). Instead, interviewees enjoyed meeting other international students from all over the world as it was “obviously easier for international students to stick together because when you are in another country you feel like you are a bit far from the people who live there … so you look for people in your situation” (27). However, six interviewees (21%) consciously made the decision to live on campus in order to meet many other students as one pointed out that otherwise it is “pretty hard to make new friends when you go abroad alone and live on your own” (13). Students who had lived in student accommodation that had been organised by their host university had experienced meaningful interactions with both Australian and international students. As one of them said: “I think it was a strong
relationship [with Australians] because I lived on campus and saw everyone every day and yeah, we always met up, it was quite good... but it was mainly university people” (13). It was clear that the European students valued opportunities to forge meaningful friendships with Australian students and other international students.

Similarly to the interviewees, and demonstrated by the high means above 4 shown in Table 34 below, almost all survey respondents expected to meet and spend time with Australian and also with international students at their host university. However, in reality most respondents did not meet and spend as much time with Australian students as they thought they would.

**Table 34:** Survey respondents’ expectations and experiences of the following things occurring during their Australian sojourns (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Expectations before coming to Australia</th>
<th>Experiences during stay in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To meet and spend time with Australian students</td>
<td>4.34 ± .61</td>
<td>3.09 ± 1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet and spend time with international students</td>
<td>4.09 ± .79</td>
<td>4.38 ± .92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1=‘Strongly disagree’ to 5=‘Strongly agree’

Instead, and similar to the interviewees, respondents met and spent more time with other international students. A few respondents also commented in the open-ended questions that they had ‘unexpected problems to meet or get along with their fellow Australian students’. Again, it is clear that the European students would have liked more opportunities for meaningful social interactions. This is a key finding that host institutions should pay attention to, and opportunities for events aimed at social integration should be encouraged.

It is evident from the findings that overall most students were satisfied with their study experiences at their host universities. This is also confirmed in that almost all interviewees (90%) stated that they would recommend their Australian host universities to other students at home with 69% of these students stating that they would strongly or definitely recommend their host university.
7.3.4 Key findings relating to studying in Australia

One of the objectives of this research was to explore to what extent European students’ expectations of studying at their host institution were met. The aim was to provide universities in Australia with practical knowledge about how to improve the academic experiences of their international students. This is important for the further success of hosting institutions and for Australia as a study destination overall. Former students are both advocates and critics and are likely to influence other students at home in their choice of a study abroad destination.

It was found that the beginning of a semester abroad is a crucial time for international students and it was evident from the findings that accurate and precise information given prior and in the beginning of students’ semester abroad is highly important to students. These findings are supported by other studies which also examined students’ experiences when temporarily studying abroad (Daly 2007; Krzaklewska & Krupnik 2006; Muntasira, Jiang & Tien 2009; Teichler 2004b). The qualitative data indicates that students who received comprehensive information at the start of their semester abroad and who felt welcomed at their host university were more likely to be satisfied with their study experiences abroad.

The findings of this study revealed that most students were satisfied with their overall study experiences. A minority of students mentioned experiencing academic problems. These issues were either related to their feelings that the academic standard of their courses were either too high, or too low. Another issue for some students was a lack of academic support, for example from course tutors. In addition, some of the students stated that their expectations of the content of their courses and university facilities such as the library and IT facilities were not met. The interview findings revealed that not many students had specific prior knowledge about the location of their host institutions, and for some interviewees the location of their host institution was a disappointment. In a study by Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe (2008) it was also found that 20% of the exchange students who studied in Australia reported that some of the least satisfying aspects of their time in Australia related to dissatisfaction with the university’s services and facilities, including ‘lack of assistance.
prior arrival’ and ‘lack of computers’. These students would have liked to have obtained more accurate information about their courses of study and the campus facilities prior arriving at their host universities. This is a point for consideration by host universities.

The interactions with Australian students at their host universities were reported as less meaningful or less frequent than expected by almost half of the European students. Most students spent more time with other international students. Furthermore, due to spending more time with international students, many students stated that their English skills improved only slightly, or improved less than expected. The literature supports these findings as there is a high propensity for international students to interact with either co-nationals or with other international students although they had a desire for greater contact with nationals while temporarily studying abroad (Daly 2007; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). These findings send a strong message to Australian institutions that European students are keen to integrate with national students but were rather dissatisfied with their experiences.

7.4 Travelling in Australia

It has earlier been revealed that the opportunity to travel recreationally while studying abroad was a highly important factor in most students’ selection of Australia. All interviewees and almost all of the survey respondents had travel plans prior to their departure to Australia and they travelled during their Australian sojourn. This section examines students’ motivations to travel and the information sources they utilised when searching for leisure and travel activities to undertake during their Australian sojourn. It also discusses the consumption of leisure and tourism products, and the limitations students which prevented students from travelling more in Australia.
7.4.1 Motivations to travel

In the post-SA interviews, all students agreed that travelling in Australia was a very important part of their overall study abroad experience and described a mix of travel motivations. As Figure 22 below demonstrates, it became apparent that most interviewees wanted to explore Australia, or more specifically explore Australia’s nature, landscape, cities and tourist attractions. Students expressed their mixed motivations to travel in Australia with comments such as: “to see as much of the country as possible ... to really get to know it and not just only be in one place and then have an assumption what Australia is like but not have seen it at all” (16); and “exploring the country, seeing new things I have not seen before, just to travel and of course also to relax and take advantage of my free time” (11). Around a third of the interviewees (34%) also stated that while they wanted to fulfil their general desire for travelling they were also curious to experience Australian culture and to better understand Australian people. One interviewee studying at a regional university stated that “I was aware that living in one region is not what Australia is…it is just one part and everything else is very different ... so I wanted to see more and also see the culture” (26).

A general desire to travel was stated by 52% of students as their main travel motivation including five interviewees (17%) who also added that they desired to see as much of Australia as possible because they did not know if or when they would be able to come back. For example, one interviewee said: “Australia is such a beautiful and big country I wanted to see as much as possible, explore everything and do things I have never done before ... because I do not know if I can come back and when that will be” (2) and another wanted to explore as much as possible of Australia “because you do not have a chance to visit this country so often because it is that far away” (13).
To have fun and to relax was stated as a travel motivation by 24% of the interviewees while others (17%) travelled to have a break from studying or to escape from the city. For example, two interviewees pointed out that travelling was “more to escape, to see something else and go away from university” (19), and a reason “to get away from campus because I lived there, I studied there ... I had uni 24/7, so I just wanted to get away” (13). For another interviewee travelling during the semester was more “an escape from the city”. The student said that “to explore the country is important, especially when you live in Sydney because Sydney is definitely not what Australia looks like” (6).

The various travel motivations of survey respondents were similar to those of the interview group. Table 35 below shows that the desire ‘to travel to places not visited before’, ‘to relax and have fun’ and ‘to explore and to learn about the Australian environment, culture and/or people’ were the most important motivations to travel, all three attaining a mean above 4 and a low SD.
Table 35: Survey respondents’ motivations to travel in Australia (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel motivations</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To travel to places not visited before</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To relax and have fun</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explore and learn about the Australian environment, culture and/or people</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spend time away with friends or other students</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To talk about my travel experience with friends and family at home</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To escape from study</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To escape from the city or the area of study</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1='Not important' to 5='Very important'

To escape from study and the host city was ranked as the least important motivation by respondents.

7.4.2 Information sources for leisure and travel activities

All European students utilised more than one information source when searching for tourism and travel opportunities in Australia.

As demonstrated in Figure 23 below, word-of-mouth recommendations by friends, peer students, other travellers or Australians the students had met were the most frequently used information sources by interviewees (83%). Interviewees mentioned, for example, that they got “some information from friends, especially Australians ... so one of my favoured topics with Australian people in general was always where to go in Australia” (27) and “lots of information from other students, Australian students as well and the internet of course” (20).
Figure 23: Information sources for travel activities, Interviewees (N=29), in Percentages

The internet and travel books were also frequently consulted by over half of the interviewees whereas tourist information and brochures were less frequently used. Only four interviewees (14%) used travel information from a travel agency based at their host university. However, as mentioned before, the interviewees utilised different sources to get inspired and to find specific information about travelling in Australia. For example, many interviewees made similar comments to two interviewees who used “my Lonely Planet a lot. I spoke to people, Australians, asked what they could recommend doing, and then I kept my eyes open … STA travel were really good as well, I used them a lot. I booked most of my trips with them” (10), and “mostly the internet and talking to friends” (4) to find travel-related information. The last interviewee also added that “sometimes the university provided information, for example they have a group on Facebook … about things to do or upcoming events” (4).

Prior to their departure, all interviewees stated that they would have appreciated their host university providing travel-related information and also that they were interested in participating in trips organised by their host institution. However, only six interviewees (21%) received tourism and travel information prior to their semester in Australia. Five of these interviewees participated in an overnight tour offered by their host institution before their study abroad semester commenced.
They described it as ‘a good opportunity to meet people’ from their host university. This indicates that students are likely to participate in pre-SA tours organised by their host university if offered. During their semester abroad 20 interviewees (69%) received travel information provided by their host universities but only 14 of these interviewees used any of this information.

Survey respondents also utilised more than one information source while searching for tourism- and travel opportunities in Australia. However, as Table 36 below demonstrates, the internet and word-of-mouth recommendations stood out as the most important sources utilised by respondents in their search for travel-related information. Furthermore, travel books and brochures were also reported as frequently used sources to find travel offers (mean=4.43).

Table 36: Travel information sources utilised by survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information sources found useful in the search for travel offers:</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth (WOM)</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel books and brochures</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel agency</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel agency at host university</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a six point Likert scale: 1=’Not used’; 2=’Strongly disagree’ to 6=’Strongly agree’

Travel agencies located both within and outside of the students’ host universities were ranked lowest as information sources. However, the lowest mean of 2.69 should be seen within the context of not many universities having a travel agency on their campuses.

Altogether, and as illustrated in Table 37 below, most of the survey respondents (92%) reported that their host university provided information and offers about leisure activities around the host city and also, but less frequently, about travel activities (68%) in Australia. However, fewer students reported that they had used these information sources about leisure (69%) and travel activities (40%).
Table 37: Information about leisure and travel opportunity provided by host university, Survey respondents (N=194), in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Respondents’ agreed that their host university provided:</th>
<th>Respondents used information and offers of host university</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about leisure activities in and around the host city</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about travel opportunities in Australia</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers for leisure activities in and around the host city</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers for travel activities (overnight trips)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the interview group, if students’ host universities also offered leisure activities most survey respondents (60%) participated in these activities during their semester. However, overnight travel activities offered by the host universities were less popular and only around a third of respondents (32%) participated in those trips.

Overall, students appreciated receiving information from their host university about and travel activities prior to and during their study abroad semester. Most students participated in leisure activities organised by their host university during their semester. Student engagement in leisure activities are further examined in the next section.

7.4.3 Leisure activities

In the pre-SA interview, most interviewees revealed a strong desire to see as much of their host city and the surrounding area as possible, and to have an active social life while studying in Australia. In the post-SA interview many students made similar comments to the following interviewee “every time I had the chance I just went ... just going to the different areas, there are just so many areas in Sydney ... because I was just so curious and anxious about seeing it all, experiencing it all”. She further reflected that for her “travelling is also sometimes about just being, like sitting and watching and walking” (10). However, four interviewees (14%) were more occupied with their study and work commitments than they thought they would be, and
therefore did not undertake many leisure or travel activities during their semester. For example, one of them said: “Most of the time I was very busy with the university and going to my part-time job, so my leisure time was just resting, and going to the pool, a lot of sport ... spending time seeing my friends ... socialising” (19).

Leisure activities which did not involve a high financial cost, such as going to the beach, walking through the city, on the coast or in the bush, doing outdoor and sport activities, in particular surfing, were the most popular activities among interviewees. For example, 20 interviewees said they often spent time at the beach. Relaxing with new friends was another favoured leisure activity for over half of the interviewees, who spent a lot of time with international students they had met, often during orientation week, at their host university. Over half of the interviewees also went regularly to student parties organised by their host university. For example, one interviewee said: “We had the international days, where the international students met and there were also parties on a Friday and Saturday” (7). It was apparent that the students who studied at universities which offered more opportunities for inexpensive leisure activities and social events cited more often that they had a great social experience overall than the other interviewees did.

Cultural activities such as going to museums, galleries or concerts were not as common among the interviewees and only 24% mentioned these as leisure activities they undertook during their semester. Only a few interviewees cited going to the cinema, out for dinner or shopping as leisure activities they undertook during their semester. However, to spend time doing free activities rather than activities which involved spending money was often due to financial constraints rather than a lack of interest, for example, in going out for dinner or to pubs. However, eight interviewees (28%) stated that they regularly went out with their friends to dance, to drink or to nightclubs.

As demonstrated in Table 38 below, the picture was similar in the survey group. Means above 4 indicate that survey respondents mostly spent free time with friends and fellow students and also enjoyed outdoor activities such as going to the beach or parks.
Table 38: Leisure activities undertaken by survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leisure activities</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting friends and fellow students</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities (e.g. going to beaches, parks)</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment activities (e.g. going to restaurants, movies)</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sightseeing</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport activities (e.g. surfing, hiking)</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping for pleasure</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1='Never' to 5='Very often'

As in the interview group, going shopping was ranked as the least preferred leisure activity with a mean of 2.96.

Participation in leisure activities offered by host university

Most interviewees (66%) stated in the post-SA interview that they were aware of the fact that their host university offered a few, primarily day, tours to students and 45% of all interviewees participated in a trip or tour offered by their host university. One interviewee appreciated the fact that her host university had an international club which organised “relatively cheap day tours to the Hunter Valley and to go sand boarding” as she “got to know even more people through this offer” (12). Another joined two of the trips organised by her host university saying that it made travelling “so much easier as everything is done” and she did not have to worry about “accommodation and food” (16). Another three interviewees appreciated that their the university offered weekend trips, because as one of them commented “it was a good opportunity to get out of the school but also to be around your fellow students and then get to know other people as well” (20). Day and weekend trips organised by the host university were popular activities for the students due to the fact that they were often less expensive and were convenient as they did not have much time during the semester to organise travel activities. Interviewees also experienced these trips as a good way to meet other students.

Similarly, most survey respondents (60%) also participated in activities offered by their host university during their semester. However, and as mentioned in the previous section above (see Table 37 on page 259), overnight travel activities offered
by the host universities were less popular and only around a third of respondents (32%) participated in those trips.

Overall, most students were aware of the fact that their host university provided information and offers about leisure activities around the host city. However, while fewer students stated that they had used this information 45% of interviewees and 60% of survey respondents participated in leisure activities organised by their host university during their semester. In particular, if these activities were for free or less expensive than if the students were to undertake these activities on their own. These findings suggest that there is an opportunity for the local providers of tourism services and the universities to collaborate to provide students with more options to participate in day or weekend activities while studying. However, students tended not to participate much in overnight trips offered by their host university. This was because students preferred to plan and organise their longer trips on their own and usually planned to travel with VFR and also found their own friends and travel partners while in Australia. Nevertheless, the students still appreciated having the opportunity to travel on tours should they want to, particularly if they did not find their own travel partners.

7.4.4 Travel activities and behaviour

Interviewees were asked to summarise their travel activities during their Australian sojourn. Most interviewees undertook a mix of travel activities combining self-organised travel and guided tours. Interviewees often undertook similar activities when travelling to those they did around their host city. In particular, they engaged in activities that were inexpensive such as sightseeing and visiting free attractions in the cities, spending time on the beach, and walking and hiking in National Parks during their trips. Over two-thirds of the interviewees also went on at least one guided overnight tour including tours to Fraser Island, the Whitsunday Islands, Kangaroo Island and Moreton Island, and to the Outback. Only two interviewees went on an organised overnight wine tour, two on a surf camp and one on an
Aboriginal guided tour. Interviewees who travelled north along the east coast often went on boat or diving day tours on the Great Barrier Reef.

7.4.4.1 Travel time

Most interviewees travelled either during the semester at the weekends or in the semester break (90%) and/or after (69%) their semester in Australia. Only eight interviewees (28%) went on a trip shorter than a week in Australia before their semester started. The average travel time of interviewees was six weeks. However, the travel time in Australia varied substantially among interviewees and ranged from one to fourteen weeks. As demonstrated in Table 39 below, most interviewees (69%) travelled between one and six weeks, seven interviewees (24%) travelled for between 6 and 12 weeks and two interviewees (7%) travelled for between 13 and 14 weeks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel time in weeks</th>
<th>Interview sample</th>
<th>Survey sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 6 weeks</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 12 weeks</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 13 weeks</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The picture was similar in the survey group. Survey respondents’ average overall travel time in Australia was 7.2 weeks. As demonstrated in Table 39 above, most respondents (54%) travelled between one and six weeks, 36% between seven and twelve weeks, and 10% travelled for between 13 and 25 weeks. Students also reported on the travel times of their longest trips in Australia which for most survey respondents (70%), was between one and four weeks. Most respondents (86%) undertook their longest trip after their semester, 11% during and 3% before their semester in Australia.
7.4.4.2 Travel destinations

As can be seen in Figure 24 below, travel destinations along the east coast and in Victoria followed by the Northern Territory, were most popular among interviewees.

![Figure 24: Travel destinations in Australia, Interviewees (N=29), in Percentages](image)

Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia were only visited by a few interviewees. Furthermore, around half of the interviewees (52%) stated that they travelled to other countries directly before, or after, and also during their semester in Australia. For example, these students travelled to New Zealand, Fiji and Hawaii.

Almost all interviewees who travelled along the east coast spent time in Sydney. In addition, participation in guided tours to Fraser Island and the Whitsunday Islands were also very common activities among the interviewees who travelled along the east coast. In Victoria, Melbourne and the Great Ocean Road were the most popular destinations while most interviewees who travelled to the Northern Territory went to Alice Springs to participate in an organised trip to the Outback.

The travel behaviour of survey respondents was captured only in relation to their longest trip in Australia. Thus, the results cannot be directly compared to the travel behaviour of the interviewees. Nevertheless, similarities exist as most interviewees also undertook one long trip after their semester in Australia. Over two-thirds of the survey respondents also travelled along the east coast. Victoria was visited by a quarter of survey respondents with Melbourne being the most popular destination.
in Victoria. On their longest trip in Australia, 14% of survey respondents travelled to the Northern Territory whereas Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania were visited by less than 10% of the students.

7.4.4.3 Students’ travel behaviour en route

Transport, accommodation and style of eating
The forms of transport and accommodation that the students used when travelling in Australia generally fell in the cheaper end of the transport and accommodation spectrum. As demonstrated in Table 40 below, while interviewees used a mix of transportation types to visit other locations, the majority flew by plane, drove a car or campervan they either rented or bought, or travelled by bus or train. Hostels were the preferred form of accommodation while caravan park/camping style accommodation was also used, but less often. Self-catering was the preferred dining option for the interviewees while they were travelling.

Table 40: Travel behaviour of interviewees (N=29), in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Camper Van/Car</th>
<th>Bus/Train</th>
<th>Airplane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21/41</td>
<td>24/7</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Hostels</th>
<th>Camping/Caravan park</th>
<th>Friends/Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>28/21</td>
<td>21/7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style of eating</th>
<th>Self-catering</th>
<th>Eating out</th>
<th>Not stated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey respondents also reported details about their travel behaviour on their longest trip undertaken during their Australian sojourn. Over a third of respondents travelled in a campervan, and around 20% travelled either by bus or by plane. Similar to the interviewees, almost half of the survey respondents stayed in hostels and a third in caravan and camping parks. Self-catering was the preferred style of eating for over 60% of survey respondents.

Travelling companions
Students were asked about who they were hoping to spend some travel time with during their Australian sojourn. Most interviewees (83%) stated they were expecting to meet international students at their host university to travel with and around a
third (34%) were also hoping to meet Australians to travel with. For example, one
interviewee said that while she was “hoping to meet a lot of Australians” she
expected to travel with other international students “because obviously that are
things that Australians already know” (8).

Other interviewees had already planned, prior to their Australian sojourn, to spend
some travel time with VFR visiting them from home or friends who studied with them
or lived in the same city in Australia. As demonstrated in Figure 25 below, over half
of the interviewees (52%) were visited by VFR: six were visited by family members,
five by their partners and/or seven by friends from home. Most of the interviewees
were visited by one VFR who came either during the student’s semester breaks or
after their semester to spend some travel time together while four students were
visited by two VFR. On average, the interviewees’ visitors stayed a minimum of two
weeks but most of them stayed for four to six weeks in Australia.

![Figure 25: Expectations and experiences of travel partners in Australia, Interviewees (N=29), in Percentages](image)

In addition, while some interviewees travelled with their VFR, almost all interviewees
stated in the post-SA interview that they travelled together with other international
students they had met at their host university. Many interviewees made similar
comments to this interviewee who said that while she was hoping “to meet a lot of
Australians” to travel with she “ended up with lots of international students” but was
quite happy “that it worked out so good” (4). Only five interviewees travelled with Australian friends with whom they lived.

As Table 41 below demonstrates, survey respondents expected it to be more difficult to find friends to spend leisure and travel time with in Australia than it actually was. However, it was not specified if travel friends were international students or Australians.

Table 41: Survey respondents’ expectations and experiences of finding travel partners in Australia (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Anticipated difficulties (before SA in Australia)</th>
<th>Experienced difficulties (during stay in Australia)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean¹ SD</td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding friends in Australia to spend leisure and travel time with</td>
<td>2.96 1.18</td>
<td>2.04 1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost half of the survey respondents (48%) reported that they were visited by VFR during their Australian sojourn. On average, they were visited by one friend and/or one or two family members who stayed on average between two and three weeks in Australia. On their longest trips, around a third of the survey respondents travelled with friends or relatives from their home country or with other international students.

It was clear that the students wanted to travel around Australia as much as possible within their time and financial restraints. The east coast was the most popular destination and students used a variety of modes of transport. The results suggest that students were concerned about finding travel partners when travelling in Australia but experienced no difficulties in doing so. Around half of the students were visited by VFR.

7.4.5 Reflections on Australia as a travel destination

This section examines how European students perceived Australia as a travel destination, and in particular, whether they considered travelling in Australia to be safe and affordable.
As can be seen in Table 42 below, all interviewees experienced Australia as a safe travel destination where it was easy to travel. The majority (76%) were content with the variety of tourism offers and travel opportunities they could choose from when travelling in Australia. Interviewees commented in similar ways that in Australia there are “lots of offers” (1); “such a vast variety of things you can do” (4) and that “you can do pretty much everything here” (6).

Table 42: Interviewees’ view on Australia as a travel destination (N=29), in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Australia...</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is easy and safe to travel</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation offers while travelling are good</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation offers while travelling are affordable</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport while travelling is good</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport while travelling is affordable</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A variety of tourism &amp; travel opportunities are offered</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another interviewee pointed out that as she “loves the nature and different landscapes ... the open space”. The travel opportunities Australia offered were perfect for her but she noticed that “Australia does not offer so much culture ... it is more about nature and sport” (28). However, seven interviewees (24%) were not sure about the variety of tourism offers and travel opportunities. While a few interviewees mentioned that they did not travel enough to be able to answer this question, two interviewees pointed out that in their limited travel experience all tourism offers seemed to be very similar. They said that “Australia is just like: go river rafting, jump out of the flight, surf ... that is it, which is great fun as well, but I think maybe I missed somehow some history” (10), and there is “probably a variety, but if you have not started it [travelling] it all seems the same ... I cannot see any differences, it is all great places off the coast” (5).

Another 12 interviewees (41%) stated that travelling was their most favourite part of their overall Australian sojourn. This revealed again how important the travel element of their study abroad experience was for these students.

In order to capture how the survey respondents experienced travelling in Australia, respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements listed in Table 43 below. The first four items all achieved a mean above
4.0, indicating that most survey respondents agreed that Australia offered a variety of and good quality information about travel opportunities, and that they perceived travelling in Australia to be safe and easy.

**Table 43: Survey respondents’ views on Australia as a travel destination (N=194)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia offers...</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A variety of travel activities</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good information about travel opportunities</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety while travelling</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of travel</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good accommodation for travellers</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good transport for travellers</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good traveller discounts for international students</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable travel opportunities</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ *Scores derived from a 5-point Likert: 1=’Strongly disagree’ to 5=’Strongly agree’*

Accommodation and transport were also considered as good during their travel time in Australia, and both statements related to these items achieved means over 3.6. Not surprisingly, over a third of survey respondents disagreed with the statement that there were good traveller discounts for international students and that travelling is affordable in Australia.

Altogether, when survey respondents were asked to report on how important the travel part of their overall Australian experience was, only a very small minority of students (3%) reported travelling as not being an important part, or as being only slightly important.
As clearly demonstrated in Figure 26 above, most survey respondents reported that travelling was a very important part of their Australian sojourn. This again indicates that students see a semester abroad as an opportunity to combine studying and travel, and perceived their living, study and travelling experiences as all being important.

7.4.6 Limitations to further travel

All interviewees stated that either a lack of time (24%), money (31%), or both time and money (45%), restricted them from travelling more in Australia. Most interviewees stated that they unfortunately had to go back to continue their studies at home not long after their study abroad semester finished. Some interviewees also had more study commitments than expected during their semester abroad, which restricted them from travelling more. For example, one interviewee said: “if the attendance would not have been compulsory I would have done more [travelling]. But it was not supposed that I would do big trips during the semester” (17). None of the interviewees highlighted any other travel limitations beyond time and money.
Similar to the interview group, and as shown in Table 44 below, most survey respondents reported that a ‘lack of money’ (mean=4.1) and a ‘lack of time’ (mean=3.6) were the greatest limitations to travelling more in Australia.

**Table 44**: Travel limitations experienced by survey respondents (N=194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel limitation factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of money</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No student packages or discounts available</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information about tours and trips</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety or security concerns</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Scores derived from a 5-point Likert, Experienced factors: 1=’Not at all’ to 5=’Very much’

These results confirm the findings among interviewees, that the students experienced Australia as a safe travel destination which provides sufficient information about tours and trips.

7.4.7 Discussion of key findings relating to travelling

In reviewing the previous educational tourism literature a gap in the knowledge about the importance of travel-related influences on European students’ decisions to study in Australia was identified. Therefore, the study aimed to capture which motivational factors pushed the students to travel in Australia and which of the country attractions of Australia pulled them to undertake certain leisure and travel activities. The findings of this study highlight the importance of travel while studying abroad for these students, and offer insights into their travel behaviour in Australia. This research shows that once in Australia, almost all of the students participated in leisure activities and took advantage of the travel and tourism opportunities offered.

It was found that the motivations that the students stated as their push and pull factors for selecting Australia as their study destination (see Section 6.3) were also stated by the students as their strongest motivations for undertaking leisure and travel activities when in Australia. The most important travel motivations were the desire to explore Australia’s nature and landscape, and to understand the Australian
culture and people better. Money and time were viewed as the biggest limitations to undertaking more travel.

As it was discussed in Section 2.3, international students are attracted to travel to a certain destination for leisure, excitement and adventure, and consider similar factors as a tourists do in their choice of destination (Richards & Wilson 2004; Teichler 2004b; Van Hoof & Verbeeten 2005). Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe’s (2008) study also confirms the finding in my study that temporary study abroad students engage in tourism activities as much as possible in order to gain a better understanding of their host country’s culture and people, to experience something new, and to have a break from their studies.

European students tended to travel during or after their study abroad semesters with other international students and/or friends and/or family members from their home countries. That the international students often encourage VFR while studying abroad has been confirmed by other studies (Bischoff & Koenig-Lewis 2007; Davidson et al. 2010; Taylor, Shanka & Pope 2004). The fact that 52% of interviewees and 48% of the survey respondents had VFR while studying in Australia confirms findings from a study conducted by Tourism Australia (2007) that suggested that for every two formal students, one friend or relative visits Australia during the student’s stay in Australia.

It was also found that most students were travelling along the east coast of Australia, which is along the coast of New South Wales and Queensland, and also in Victoria. Most students travelled by plane, car or campervan or a combination of these transportation modes. Backpacker hostels, camping or staying in caravan parks were the students preferred types of accommodation. In terms of mode of transport and type of accommodation, this travel behaviour of European students in Australia was also confirmed in a study by Davidson et al. (2010). However, in contrast to Davidson et al.’s (2010) study which found that European students tended to take shorter breaks of less than a week, this study reveals that the students travelled an average of six to seven weeks in total. This was mostly in one long period after their semester in Australia was finished. However, it is acknowledged here, that there are problems
with comparing Davidson et al.’s (2010) study with my study. Firstly, Davidson et al. did not specify which program these European students studied. Second, the results were reported on the European students’ most recent trip, whereas in my study the interviewees’ overall travel experiences were considered, and among the interviewees and survey respondents’ travel experiences were mostly related to their longest trip in Australia.

Similar to Davidson et al.’s (2010) study, Glover’s (2011) study also found that short breaks of up to three nights were more common among international degree students in Australia than longer holidays which is in contrast to finding in my study.

7.5 Most important benefits of the Australian sojourn

Students were asked to reflect on what they perceived as the most important benefits of their Australian sojourn. Interviewees were asked this question in the pre- and post-SA interviews in order to see whether the perceived benefits changed after the study abroad semester. In both interviews, most students stated two or three benefits which all seemed equally significant to them. For example, one interviewee said that “improving English skills and learning about another education system and culture were as important as to manage to live so far away” (24).

Overall, and as demonstrated in Figure 27 below, the interviewees stated that they perceived similar benefits as most important before and after their study abroad semester. There was one exception to this, related to career prospects which were stated by 34% of the interviewees as an important benefit in the pre-SA interview but by no interviewee in the post-SA interview. However, slightly more interviewees in the pre-SA interviews than in the post-SA interviews stated that improving their English skills, and personal development, were important benefits. To experience a new culture and lifestyle, and also to experience a new academic system, were cited by more or less the same numbers of interviewees in the pre- and post-SA interviews. The percentages of interviewees who stated that meeting new people as an important benefit increased after they studied in Australia. Interestingly, to enhance
career prospects’ was not stated by any of the interviewees in the post-SA interview compared to 34% in the pre-SA interview.

Almost half of the interviewees (45%) also stated that their favourite part of their overall Australian sojourn was related to meeting new people, and to their travel experiences. For example, interviewees commented that their favourite part in Australia was “definitely travelling, as I said study was not my priority, going out with friends, just enjoying the time, I had such a good time here, so much fun” (4), and “socialising with other people and going out and having fun, just crazy, and travelling... see the country” (3). It was clear that for these students, travel and meeting new people were the highlights of their Australian sojourn.

The survey respondents were asked to reflect on the ‘most important benefits for you of studying in Australia’ post their study abroad experience and to list a maximum of the three most important benefits. A total of 177 respondents (91% of all survey respondents) did this. Five main category groups emerged out of 19 sub-categories. As can be seen in Figure 28 below, the categories included socio-cultural and educational/career benefits which were seen as most important, followed by travel and personal benefits. The group of other important benefits included statements which were reported by fewer survey respondents and which did not fit into one of

Figure 27: Perceived benefits of their overall Australian sojourn before- and after SA semester, Interviewees (N=29), in Percentages
the other categories such as living in a warm climate, meeting with friends or family who lived in Australia, and to see whether they wanted to live in Australia in the future.

Within the group of socio-cultural benefits, to meet people from all over the world and to find new friends, and also to experience to live in a different culture were each reported by 38% of the 177 survey respondents as one of their most important benefits.

![Pie chart showing most important benefits of Australian sojourn for survey respondents (N=177), in Percentages](image)

**Figure 28:** Most important benefits of Australian sojourn for survey respondents (N=177), in Percentages  
*Note: Survey respondents could list several benefits*

Improvement in English language skills was the most frequently cited benefit (47%) falling under the category of educational benefits. Within this group, experiencing a different academic system, the content of courses, or improving academic skills were cited as the most important benefit by almost a third of survey respondents. Only 5% of the 177 students in the survey group reported that the most important benefit of their Australian sojourn was that it may enhance their career prospects.

Within the group of travel-related benefits, altogether 22% of respondents reported that to travel in Australia was the most important benefit. Personal development,
including to get a new perspective on things and to adapt and live in a new country, were seen as the most important benefit by 21% of survey respondents.

In summary, and not surprisingly, when students reflected on the most important benefits of their overall Australian experiences, the socio-cultural and linguistic categories emerged again. In particular, experiencing a new culture, lifestyle and a different academic system and meeting people from all over the world were the most frequent cited responses of European students’ most important benefits of their Australian sojourn.

These findings reaffirm existing studies which identify the multiple benefits of a study abroad period and highlight broad socio-cultural development aspects including personal, academic, and language development (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003; Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino 2006; Franklin 2010; King, R, Findlay & Ahrens 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Mpinganjira 2009; Sutton & Rubin 2004). Most students in this study greatly valued the opportunity to experience new and different social and cultural environments and were pleased to have gained an alternative view of the personal and academic worlds. The finding that European students, particularly students participating in temporary mobility programs, were highly motivated to study abroad in order to develop their personal, social, and language skills has been previously identified in other studies as one of the most common benefits for students from developed countries (Findlay et al. 2006; HEFCE 2004; Krzaklewska & Krupnik 2006; Van Mol & Timmerman 2013; Vossensteyn et al. 2010).

To my knowledge this the first time that a study of European students studying temporarily in Australia, has highlighted perceived benefits and how the students’ perceptions of these benefits changed after completion of their study abroad semester.

Lastly, students were asked to describe their overall study, living and travel experiences in Australia in just a few words. The majority of the 29 interviewees and the 164 survey respondents (85% of all survey respondents) who described their overall Australian sojourn reported having a very positive experience. Figure 29 below illustrates that interviewees either had a good (48%) or an amazing (31%) time
in Australia. Five interviewees (17%) even described their Australian experience as ‘the best time’ or ‘the best experience’ they had had so far in their lives. Only one interviewee described her experience not so positively, stating that overall she found her time in Australia rather “demanding and so busy” (19).

Figure 29: Interviewees short description of their overall Australian sojourn (N=29), in Percentages

Similar to the interviewees, the majority of the 164 survey respondents who described their overall Australian sojourn had a very positive experience. As demonstrated in Figure 30 below, they either cited that their study abroad experience was an ‘amazing, great experience’ (41%) or described it as the ‘best time/experience/decision in their life so far’ (23%). Comments in this last category included: “It was absolutely the best experience of my life, right now I feel nothing can top this feeling”, “The best thing I have ever done, beautiful country and nice people”, or “Epic, incredible, year of my life, once in a life-time opportunity”. Many of the survey respondents related their positive experiences to all the friendly, open-minded and helpful people they met in Australia.
Figure 30: Survey respondents’ description of their overall Australian sojourn (N=194), in Percentages

Altogether, 14% of the respondents were not so overwhelmed about their Australian experience yet they still described it as a positive experience where they had had a good time and/or reported that it was a worthwhile experience. A few respondents (4%) pointed out that they had a very positive study experience in Australia. However, a few respondents (3%) described their study experience as more demanding than expected.

7.6 Conclusion

This study has investigated European students’ living, study and travel experiences. Overall, most European students had high expectations of their Australian sojourns. For the most part, these expectations were fulfilled. The overall positive experiences of students’ Australian sojourn highlighted that Australia is a very desirable location for temporary study abroad which suited the needs and desires of the students. It was also found that students experienced fewer difficulties than they anticipated.

This research has revealed that the students saw studying abroad as an interrelated socio-cultural, personal, academic and travel experience. It must be stressed that these aspects were all of great importance. In other words, the academic aspect was
not of paramount importance over the others. Students highly valued the opportunity to be exposed to new people and cultures, to develop their language and academic skills and to experience life in Australia. For example, it was found that motivational factors such as students’ desire for personal and professional growth and also destination factors that were highly influential in their decision-making were intertwined with, and in some cases even mirrored, students’ expectations of their Australian sojourn. Particularly, this chapter highlighted how important it was for almost all students to travel while studying abroad, and offered insights into their travel behaviour in Australia.

A critical factor in a positive study abroad experience was the large extent to which the students’ expectations were met. This finding provides a new perspective and enriched understanding of the students’ expectations prior to their study abroad semester and experiences that was previously missing in the literature. Identifying the factors that make the international students’ experience in Australia positive are valuable and useful for the educational industry and in particularly, for academic advisers and people at Australian institutions working with international students.
8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Understanding the decision-making processes of European students

The overall aim of this research was to understand European students’ decisions to temporarily study in Australia and their travel and tourism behaviours while in Australia. This study has identified several key gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the decision-making processes of European students in selecting Australia as a study destination. This research also responds to the gap in our understanding of the relationship between international students’ study and travel and tourism activities.

This study has noted that in the second decade of 21st century more students than ever leave their countries to undertake tertiary education. This has substantial economic, political and cultural impacts on the educational institutions and the countries that send and receive international students. In particular, for countries such as Australia, which emerged as a major trader in international higher education in the 1990s, international higher education contributes significantly to the economy. The findings of this study strongly suggest that if Australia wishes to remain successful in the international education market, and if it is to continue to attract large numbers of students from around the world, then it is crucial for Australian tertiary institutions to better understand the decision-making processes of the different segments of the international student market. To help fill these gaps in knowledge and understanding, this study examined the influences on, and steps involved, in European students’ decision-making when choosing Australia as their study destination and when choosing their host institution, and explored the relationships between international education and tourism from the perspective of students who travelled in Australia. The extent to which students’ expectations of life, study and travel in Australia were met was also explored.
This chapter presents the key findings of this study. The findings are presented so that they respond to the objectives of this study. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed, along with the study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

8.2 Research findings

The key findings of this study are discussed in this section in light of the research objectives stated in Section 1.4.

Although there is much research on international students’ decision-making processes in relation to the selection of their study destinations, the research on temporary international students is very limited. It was argued in Chapters 2 and 3 that previous studies in this field have tended to focus more on international students studying in degree programs. In addition, and particularly for the Australian international education market, there has been a focus on the Asian market. Furthermore, previous studies have often only focused on one part of international students’ decision-making, for example their choice of host destination. In addition, previous studies have often focused primarily on economic, academic and institutional factors influencing students’ decisions. Few studies have incorporated all the stages of decision-making that prospective international students undertake, and most have neglected to consider a variety of influential factors. In addition, travel-related factors in international students’ decision-making processes have been largely ignored.

The narrow focus of previous research makes it difficult to compare study findings on international students’ decisions-making processes with temporary international students, particularly with those coming from Western European countries. A key contribution of this study is that it has shifted the focus away from the Asian student market and towards the European market of temporary international students in Australia. In addressing the gaps in the literature, this study adopted a holistic approach to examining the complexities of students’ decision-making processes by including the socio-cognitive factors of the students, the information sources they
utilised, and push and pull factors which were influential during the various stages of their decision-making.

This study took a different approach to previous studies. It argued that temporary study abroad students are influenced by sources of information, personal preferences, knowledge and motivational factors, and also specific facilitating, push and pull factors in students’ home and host countries and institutions. To a greater or lesser extent these influences affected all stages of their decision-making. Therefore, all of these stages require examination. This study found that European students usually followed a more or less sequential four-step decision-making process. First, students decided to study abroad in general (predisposition stage), then selected Australia as their preferred study abroad destination (destination stage). This was usually followed by the institutional stage where students selected and applied to study at a suitable host institution (institution stage). Once their application was accepted students took the offer of admission and their decision was finalised (final decision stage). However, it needs to be noted that these stages were overlapping and interconnected, particularly the destination and institution stages. To my knowledge, this is the first time that all decision-making steps of temporary international students studying in Australia have been identified and examined.

8.2.1 Influences and steps involved in students’ decisions to study in Australia

This section highlights the key findings related to research objective one, which was to examine the influences on and steps involved in European students’ decision-making processes when deciding to temporarily study in Australia.

8.2.1.1 Predisposition stage: the decision to study abroad

It was found that students’ general decisions to study abroad were mainly driven by their desire to travel, to experience other cultures, and to develop linguistic, academic and social skills. However, a key finding was that students’ desire to
enhance academic skills ranked substantially lower than their desire to travel and to improve their social and linguistic skills, but nevertheless remained an important motivational factor. Unlike international degree students from developing countries, whose motivations are mainly of an academic, migration or economic nature, European students are motivated by a broad range of other factors including socio-cultural, linguistic and travel-related factors. These are important findings as few other studies have focused on understanding the predisposition stage. Consequently, this study has contributed new knowledge on the differences in the motivations of students and information sources they utilise when making their decisions. Further, the few studies that have included the decision-making factors influential in the predisposition stage, for example Chen (2007), focused on international degree students.

In the predisposition stage, recommendations and information, particularly from friends, family and fellow students who had studied abroad, were the most influential factors. Furthermore, it was found that internal academic advisers at students’ home institutions often supported an existing interest or sparked a first interest to study abroad at the beginning of student’s university study by providing information. It was found that home universities were integral to students’ early exposure to temporary study abroad opportunities, and that information, support and guidance provided by academic advisers acted as a significant facilitating factor in these students’ decisions to study abroad. In contrast to most studies in this field the current study described these factors as facilitating factors, particularly in the case of students for whom studying abroad was not a compulsory part of their home degree.

Additionally, previous studies have largely neglected to include the influence of recommendations and information provided by reference groups, in particular in the predisposition stage, and whether these are different in the other stages of decision-making. This study identified these factors for every single stage and how they differ between stages.

While previous studies have included the influence on students’ decision-making process from information from groups such as academic advisers, these information
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Sources have often been related to factors that pushed students out of their home countries to study abroad.

I argue that home universities are integral to students’ early exposure to temporary study abroad programs as information given by academic advisers presents an opportunity for attracting students to study abroad. However, this study found that information and advice from reference groups acted as a facilitating factor rather than as a push factor in students’ home countries. For example, academic advisers provided information about study abroad programs and about the availability of general and financial support to students when going abroad; but they did not push the students to temporarily study abroad. Rather, academic advisers positively influenced European students in their decisions to study abroad. That fact that studying abroad was not a compulsory part of their home degree for over three-quarters of interviewees (76%) and survey respondents (82%) supports the finding that European students were not pushed out of their home countries by national or institutional requirements. Therefore, in my view, it is only appropriate to describe these facilitating factors as push factors for the students who were required to undertake a study abroad program as part of their home university degree. This was the case for less than a quarter of interviewees (24%) and respondents (18%).

After students have decided to temporarily study abroad they moved to the next stage, the destination stage. However, it was found that a minority of exchange students by-passed the process of choosing a host country and looked at host institutions directly.

8.2.1.2 Destination stage: the search for a destination country and the decision to study in Australia

During the ‘destination stage’ European students searched for information about the attributes of countries they considered to be potential study abroad destinations. It was found that the students’ general motivations for studying abroad, their individual preferences and existing knowledge, as well as recommendations from certain
reference groups which were present in the predisposition stage, all contributed to a pre-selection process in students’ selection of host countries.

In relation to students’ decision-making, the main conclusions from this study are that students were most strongly motivated to study in Australia by a desire to experience a different culture and lifestyle; a desire to meet new people from all over the world; a desire to travel in Australia; and a desire to improve their English language skills. For example, around 60% of the interviewees and over 70% of survey respondents cited the desire to experience the multi-cultural environment and the easy-going lifestyle in Australia as an influential factor in their selection of Australia, and for over 60% of the interviewees and around 90% of the survey respondents it was important to improve their English language skills while studying in Australia.

One of the strongest, and in some cases, the strongest motivation, was a desire to travel while studying in Australia as all interviewees and over 94% of the survey respondents cited that they wanted to travel while studying in Australia. Tourism and travel opportunities, and the geographic location of Australia, were cited as the most important factors influencing students’ selection of Australia. This finding differed from other studies on international degree students who chose Australia as their study destination. In other studies, academic and cost factors, and a desire to enhance future career opportunities were higher in the students’ motivations than their desire to travel in Australia or experience the Australian lifestyle.

A further key finding that was consistent across student responses was that students wanted to study far from home, and in a country outside Europe which offered a different cultural and lifestyle experience. The students perceived studying in Australia as a ‘real’ study abroad experience which would take them outside of their comfort zones and was therefore more challenging than a study abroad experience within Europe where the students would be able to go home during their semester. Therefore, to live a great distance from home while studying, and to cope with the knowledge of the vast distance between home and their place of study, was cited by most students as an important factor in their decision to come to Australia.
It was found that students used a wide range of sources of information to build up their knowledge base about Australia before they finally decided to study there. It was revealed that, as in the predisposition stage, recommendations and information, particularly from friends, family and from fellow students who had studied or travelled in Australia, were one of the most powerful influences in students’ selection of Australia as their study destination. The influence of parents was slightly less important than the influence of friends and fellow students in this stage. This is a substantially different finding from research on Asian students which revealed that they were strongly influenced by their parents and relatives in choosing Australia (Arambewela, Hall & Zuhair 2005; Eduworld 2001; Son & Pearce 2005). Internal academic advisers at students’ home institutions were moderately influential in students’ destination selection as they provided some study-related information on studying in Australia. The only sources of advisers utilised by students outside of their home university were educational agencies which provided primarily study-related but also general information about studying and living in Australia. However, students in this study did not use educational agencies as much as international degree students in other studies used them (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012; AEI 2003; Harris 2002).

Unlike other international students, particularly Asian degree students (Adams, Leventhal & Connely 2012; AEI 2003; Harris 2002; Michael, Armstrong & King 2003), European students in this study did not often use external academic advisers from Australian universities at designated educational information events or exhibitions or on campus visits in prospective international student’s home countries. Instead, students utilised websites to gather information about Australia and sometimes other study destinations. Resources from print media were also less relevant. These findings suggest that Australian universities who spend great amounts of money to send their representatives over to European universities should perhaps reconsider this marketing approach.

The main conclusions that derive from this part of the study are that European students considered destination country-related pull factors more important than any academic or economic factors in their decision to temporarily study in Australia.
In fact, economic factors, work opportunities and an easy application and visa process appeared to have almost no influence on students’ choices of Australia. In the search for the factors that distinguish Australia from other Western and English-speaking countries, for example, New Zealand, Canada or the US which are also far away from Europe, it was found that Australia offered certain country attributes to the students which best fulfilled their needs. For example, country pull factors such as Australia’s climate, natural geographic beauty and unique flora and fauna which offered great travel opportunities were the most significant location factors influencing students to select Australia. Together with the opportunity to improve English language skills and to experience a different cultural, lifestyle and environment in relative safety and security, these country pull factors were a strong drawcard for European students. Furthermore, to escape a European winter and have the opportunity to live in a warm and sunny climate close to the beach, and also to study far from home rather than seeking a better educational experience, were also highly important in students’ decision-making. That the opportunity to work in Australia while studying there had almost no influence on the students’ decisions demonstrates a further difference between the international temporary students and the degree students. For many degree students the opportunity to earn money while studying abroad is a very important factor in their decisions (Lee 2013; Maringe & Carter 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002).

The study found that students reconsidered the most important pull factors of the different study destinations, and compared them several times before making a final decision. However, while students were searching predominantly for general information about Australia or other prospective host countries they often searched for information about various cities and suitable host institutions at the same time. Some students also decided at this stage to apply for a study program in more than one host country and therefore the decision to study in Australia was not finalised at the destination stage, which confirmed the observation that the stages of destination and host institution choice were overlapping for a large number of students.
8.2.1.3 Institution stage: the search and decision of host institution

The majority of European students selected their host institution after they selected Australia as their study abroad country. Recommendations and information from friends, family and students who had previously studied in Australia were also utilised in the institutional stage but were slightly less important than they were in students’ selection of Australia (destination stage). Instead, the students, particularly the free-movers, utilised information about host institutions in Australia from educational agencies and also from academic advisers based at their home universities. Additionally, information provided on the websites of Australian institutions were most frequently used by the students in their search for host institutions. Similarly to the destination stage where the students selected Australia, information from alumni networks, print media and external academic advisers was not utilised by many European students.

While in general, it was important for these European students to study at a host university known for good quality in teaching and service provided to international students, this study found that the students expected that this was the case for the majority of Australian institutions. In other words, they tended to assume that it would be the case for all Australian institutions. Instead of focusing on the reputations or rankings of host institutions, the students focused predominantly on the location of the institution and the range and quality of study courses offered. The majority of students participating in an exchange program stated that they did not have much choice in their host institution selection; rather, they selected a university with an ‘existing exchange program’. This is an important finding that reveals that the selection focus of exchange students is on the destination rather than the institution. Furthermore, compatible semester times between home and host universities and recognition of study credits achieved abroad at their home university were also cited as important. Tuition fees and an easy application processes had almost no influence. Compatible semester times were a factor that many other studies among temporary students have overlooked. Further, the finding that tuition fees are not an important factor in temporary students’ decisions, but are important in the decision-making of many degree students (Chen 2007; Lee 2013; Muche & Waechter 2005) again
demonstrates that degree and temporary students differ. This finding reinforces the view that international students are not homogenous and that degree and temporary students have distinctive characteristics that need to be understood and treated accordingly.

8.2.1.4 Final decision stage

European students moved on to the final decision stage after they selected an Australian institution and applied to study there. Once their application was accepted they took the offer of admission and the decision was finalised. It was found in this study that only two of the 29 interviewees applied to two universities at the same time and both students accepted the first offer of admission they received. Few existing studies have indicated which factors influence international students when making a final decision, thus there is limited data to compare the findings of this study with other studies. However, this study found that for the students who applied to more than one host university, or stated that Australia was not their first choice of host country, the application process was an important and pivotal factor that helped to facilitate an overall positive student experience, and even influenced students’ final decision of where to study. This finding is particularly important for the international student departments dealing with student applications, highlighting that administrative processes should not be overlooked.

This study underlined that European students’ decision-making processes when selecting their temporary study abroad destination are complex, and that several factors influence students’ decisions. Previous studies largely neglected to include the influence of recommendations and information provided by reference groups, in particular in the predisposition stage, and whether these information sources vary between students’ stages of decision-making to study abroad. This study concludes that socio-cognitive decision-making factors such as recommendations and information provided by reference groups influenced students in every single stage of their decision-making and varied in their importance during the four decision stages. The students followed more or less sequential four steps in their decision-
making and these stages overlapped and were interconnected. For example, it was found that recommendations and information from friends, fellow students, and sometimes family members who had studied or travelled in Australia, were most important in students’ selection of their host country. However, these groups were less important in students’ selection of their host institution. On the other hand, information from academic advisers at students’ home universities were utilised more frequently by the students in the predisposition stage than in their choice of study destination.

The main conclusions in relation to students’ decision-making processes when studying temporarily abroad are that students were most strongly encouraged by personal motivations and motivations which relate to the social-cultural aspects of a host destination. For example, a desire to experience a different culture and lifestyle; a desire to meet new people from all over the world; a desire to travel; and a desire to improve their linguistic skills.

Related to students’ choice of study destinations, the main conclusions that derive from this part of study are that European students considered destination country-related pull factors more important than any academic or economic factors in their decision to temporarily study in Australia. For example, country pull factors such as Australia’s climate, natural geographic beauty and unique flora and fauna, which offered great travel opportunities, were the most significant location factors influencing students to select Australia.

In relation to students’ choice of host institution, good quality in teaching and services provided to international students at Australian universities are important to European students. However, the location of the institution and the range and quality of study courses offered appears more important than reputation or rankings of host institutions.

In conclusion, this study acknowledged that international students are not a homogenous group and therefore it is important to distinguish between international students depending on the mobility program they are undertaking and their social-cultural background. For example, whether prospective international students come
from developing or developed countries, and whether they are intending to study in degree or temporary mobility programs. If Australian tertiary institutions want to understand what drives students to participate in temporary study abroad programs they also need to investigate the national and institutional context of student mobility in students’ home country.

8.2.2 The relationships between international education and tourism

This study demonstrated that a further growth in the international education sector in Australia would likely contribute to a growth in the tourism sector. While it is generally agreed that relationships exist between international education and tourism, this study found that there is a gap in knowledge and understanding of the nature of this relationship. Furthermore, studies exploring the travel motivations and behaviours of, in particular temporary, international students in Australia are limited. This research responds to this gap in understanding and knowledge in the key findings related to research objective two which was to examine the relationships between international education and tourism from the perspective of European students who are undertaking educational travel within Australia in this section. The research questions focused on the recreational tourism or travel-related activities students undertook in Australia and on identifying and exploring students’ travel motivations, travel destinations and travel behaviour.

The students viewed travelling and studying abroad as connected and interrelated experiences and did not want to compromise on the travel part of their experience. As stated above, the opportunity to travel while studying abroad was cited as a highly important factor in most students’ selection of Australia. All interviewees and almost all survey respondents (97%) took advantage of the travel and tourism opportunities offered in Australia. Most students would have travelled more in Australia if they have had more time, money and opportunities to do so. The majority of students travelled an average of six to seven weeks, most likely in one long period after their study abroad semester in Australia was finished. To explore Australia’s nature and
landscape and to understand Australian culture and people better were the strongest motivations to travel while studying in Australia. Finances and time were found to be the only two major limitations to undertaking more travel. In relation to students’ travel activities and behaviours, the main findings of this study are that students travelled an average of six to seven weeks in total. In contrast to previous studies which suggested that international students in Australia tended to take shorter breaks of less than a week when travelling, this study revealed that European students travelled most commonly in one long period after their semester in Australia was finished. However, most students travelled during their semester as well, though these trips tended to be of shorter duration. It was found that the students travelled particularly with other international students and/or friends or family members from home who visited them while studying in Australia. Most students travelled by plane and car or campervan. Backpacker hostels but also camping or caravan parks were European students’ preferred types of accommodation, demonstrating students’ preferences for modestly priced accommodation.

This finding provides a new perspective on the travel behaviours of European students in Australia. This information can be utilised by tourism and education marketers to develop material and campaigns that target the interests and needs of these students. There are numerous tourism resources that could be utilised for marketing education to study abroad students. Furthermore, and as stated above, in order to understand the potential relationships between international education and tourism better, there is a need to focus more on students by nationality rather than to view them as a homogenous market. As Shanka, Ali-Knight and Pope (2002) pointed out cultural differences between international students influences their travel behaviour in Australia.

8.2.3 Students’ expectations of life, study and travel

The third research objective that underpinned this study was to explore the extent to which European students’ expectations of life, study and travel in Australia were met. While the key findings of the travel experiences have been summarised in the
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previous section, this section, presents the key findings related to students’ life and study experiences in Australia.

In general, the students expressed a variety of high expectations for their Australian sojourn which were more or less met. Improving English language skills, enhancing their personalities and meeting new people from all over the world, along with learning about a new culture were the expectations given most often reported by the students. The students agreed that they developed their personalities in a variety of ways including becoming more independent, open-minded, and flexible, and developing better social skills while studying abroad. Adapting to the cultural and lifestyle differences of Australia was not a problem for the students. Rather, they perceived the lifestyle in Australia and living far from home as enjoyable and a great experience.

Although students’ experiences were generally positive, there were a few areas where students did express some disappointments. European students’ expectations about improving their English skills were slightly higher than they experienced and most interviewees were rather disappointed at not improving their English skills as much as they expected. This was mainly due to the fact that they had most interactions with other international students during their university life than to Australian students. This finding also relates to the second main disappointment of the students: many students were disappointed at the amount and quality of communication and interaction with Australian students which was less than they had anticipated. Furthermore, some of the interviewees expressed their irritations about the high numbers of Asian students at their host universities which sometimes resulted in a low quality of English during their courses. In general, while meeting other international students was described as easy by almost all students the interaction and communication with Australian people inside and outside of university was experienced by some students as rather disappointing.

Apart from those issues, and the fact that students said living costs in Australia were too high, students found, as they expected, that Australia was a safe country to live, study and travel in. Students were satisfied with their study/academic experiences at
their host universities where they received sufficient information at their orientations, experienced a good quality of teaching, and were satisfied with the service and support provided.

The main conclusion that comes from this part of the study is that students regarded the living and travelling experiences as equally or more important than the study experience they had in Australia. The two greatest experiences for most students were to meet people from all over the world and to travel in Australia. It is concluded therefore that in order to attract European students to study abroad in Australia, there should be a significant marketing focus on these experiential aspects. In addition, it is also vital that the agencies and institutions involved in hosting students and facilitating the students' experiences also engage with these experiential aspects and create opportunities to ensure that the student's expectations are satisfied, and it is vital to ensure former study abroad students are advocates for Australia for future study abroad students.

8.3 Contributions to knowledge and to practice

This section outlines the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of this study.

8.3.1 Theoretical contributions

Based on my review of the literature, this study is the first Australian study to exclusively examine study abroad students from European countries who studied temporarily in Australia. Some of the previous research on temporary students in Australia investigated the decision-making of exchange students, coming mainly from the US. This study included students studying as free-movers and exchange students and found that the socio-cognitive characteristics, information sources and push and pull destination factors were influential in all four stages of students' decisions, from the predisposition to the final stage of accepting a study abroad placement in Australia. Furthermore, this study has highlighted the importance of the influences
of travel- and tourism-related factors in students’ decision-making. By also examining aspects of the travel behaviour of these students and the extent to which their expectations of their Australian sojourn were met, this study contributes to the increasing body of research into the travel behaviour of international students when studying abroad. This study found that the positive and extensive travel experiences of the students contributed considerably to their overall positive study experiences.

Existing studies have primarily used the push-pull theory to explain the factors influencing students’ selection of their host countries and institutions but only a few studies have additionally considered which factors, for example their motivations, recommendations of reference groups and the destination factors have influenced international students in the predisposition and final decision stages of their decision-making. This study has argued that using only the push-pull theory provides insufficient insights to address the complexity of the research objectives and questions in this study.

This study therefore incorporated cognitive-decision-making theory into its framework. While the push-pull theory of destination choice concentrates on the variety of factors influential in students’ selections of host countries and institutions, the CDM theory acknowledges the individual and socio-cognitive characteristics of students that may account for their decisions (when selecting their host study destination). It was found that taking the socio-cognitive processes of students’ decision-making into account would be a valuable contribution to the push-pull theory.

The benefit of applying and combining the two theories in one research project was that this allowed me to view the research questions from different theoretical lenses, providing a greater and more holistic understanding of students’ decision-making processes when choosing Australia as their study destination. This study has extended the use of the push-pull theory.

Through structuring my conceptual framework so that it incorporated the socio-cognitive decision-making factors of the students, as well as the influential push and pull factors across all four stages, the holistic framework emphasised looking at the
relationship between the various factors instead of merging them all under the categories of push and pull factors, as many studies have done. This structure helped me to focus on understanding and explaining a range of different areas when analysing the data findings.

The gaps in the existing research examining the decision-making processes of temporary, and particularly European, study abroad students when choosing Australia as their study destination had been addressed throughout this thesis. This study extended the predominantly quantitative research on tertiary international students extant in the literature by utilising a qualitatively driven mixed-methods research design (QUAL+quan) to gain a deeper understanding of the complex decision-making processes of European students when selecting their study destinations. This study addressed these gaps by making a number of theoretical and empirical contributions to the field of international education, in particular towards a better understanding of international students’ decisions and their travel behaviour during their study abroad experiences.

8.3.2 Contributions to practice

This research contributes unique and timely insights for those involved in the marketing of Australia as a destination for international students. A number of practical implications for the formulation of marketing strategies aimed at attracting European students are briefly considered in this section.

**General marketing strategies for the European market**

This research provided empirical evidence to suggest that the geographical location, environment and climate and also travel opportunities offered by Australia are highly important attractions in selecting to study abroad there. The findings of this study recommend that these pull destination factors of Australia should be viewed as one of the foremost competitive advantages of Australia compared to other English-speaking study destinations. This study suggests that to market Australia as a potential temporary study destination to European tertiary students these attributes of Australia should be more emphasised and incorporated into marketing strategies.
Building strong relations with educational advisers in students’ home countries

As summarised in Section 8.2, the results of this study revealed that recommendations and information, particularly from friends, family and fellow students who had studied abroad, and also internal academic advisers at students’ home institutions were the most influential factors in their decision-making processes. Educational advisers at students’ home universities were often integral to students’ early exposure to temporary study abroad opportunities. It was also found that educational agencies in students’ home countries played an important role in students’ choice of host university.

Therefore, it might be more effective to focus on building stronger relationships with internal and external advisers in students’ home countries than to spend considerable sums of money on educational advisers from Australian universities going over to advertise their institutions in European countries. This study clearly showed that information provided by academic advisers from Australian universities were hardly utilised by European students. As discussed earlier, this finding is in contrast to other studies which have showed that this information source was often utilised by international degree students coming from Asian countries when selecting Australia as their study destination. This is one of the many differences found between temporary and degree international students which needs to be considered when marketing Australian institutions to European temporary students. Another issue which was important to over 60% of the students in both samples was the issue of courses recognition. European and Australian institutions should work better together to guarantee that students have final assurance from their home university prior to their abroad semester that all course credits received in Australia would be transferable.

Practical implications for Australian universities for preparing temporary students for their Australian sojourn

Most students did not have much time to adapt to the new environment in their host cities and universities before starting their semester in Australia. As most students were only in Australia for one study abroad semester they wanted to experience as much as they could as soon they arrived. Students who experienced difficulties, such
as those related to financial matters, and in some cases to finding affordable accommodation, stated that they would have appreciated receiving better information about these issues prior to coming to Australia. Therefore, the better prepared and informed students are the less they usually struggle in the beginning. This is, particularly the case in finding accommodation, which can be a time consuming and frustrating issue.

Concluding from the findings of this study it is suggested that educational advisers in students host institutions should be aware that temporary students would like to receive better information about some academic and practical issues. In summary, students wished they had better information prior to coming to Australia and/or better support about the following issues:

- course content and final assurance of their course program
- location of host university
- cost of living
- finding affordable accommodation.

**Practical implications for Australian universities for enhancing temporary students’ experiences during their Australian sojourn**

The findings of this study about students’ experiences at their host universities send a strong message to Australian institutions that students are keen to integrate with national students but were rather dissatisfied with their experiences. Most students would have liked more opportunities for meaningful social interactions with Australian students. This is a key finding which suggests that host institutions should pay attention to opportunities for events aimed at social integration should be encouraged.

Most students were disappointed with the lack of interaction they had with Australian people. A key finding and recommendation is that host universities should be aware of and seek opportunities for events aimed at social integration in order to enhance international students’ interactions with Australians. For example, connecting international students with volunteer projects in their host communities...
could be one way of creating meaningful cross-cultural experiences for these students. One interviewee recalled that she met many locals when she volunteered in a sailing project for disabled people. Findings of Huang’s study (2008) also support that voluntary work provides not only excellent opportunities for international students to connect more closely with their host country’s society and people but is also an opportunity to improve language skills. It is recommended therefore that host institutions should encourage such activities to help facilitate a positive study abroad experience.

It was identified in this study that the opportunity to travel in Australia while studying was a very important part of students’ decisions to study in Australia. It was also identified that students’ travel experiences were an important, and for many students, the most enjoyable, part of their overall Australian sojourn. One conclusion of the findings is that students are likely to participate in short overnight trips or day tours organised by their host university directly prior to their start of their SA semester. Interviewees who participated in a tour organised by their host university were highly satisfied with these trips as they saw them as a great opportunity to connect with other students right from their beginning of their experience.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that host universities can collaborate with tour providers and tourism organisations to provide information and offer short trips for international students. Not only would the travel industry benefit, but the host institutions would also benefit as satisfied students are good advocates for Australia as a study destination and are more likely to be return visitors to Australia.

8.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

8.4.1 Limitations of this study

It is important to acknowledge and identify the limitations of this research. It must be recognised here that interviewees were asked about their decision-making
processes and their expectations of their Australian sojourn prior to the start of their study abroad semester whereas survey respondents were asked a considerable time after they had finished their study program in Australia. Therefore, there may be some differences in responses due to the survey respondents having actually completed their study experiences a while ago and perhaps had more time to reflect on their experiences or it is also possible that they were fonder and more nostalgic towards Australia when answering this questions. Furthermore, while students in both sample groups were asked about their experiences after their study abroad semester was finished, there might be a limitation to comparing the findings as survey respondents reported them after they had been away from Australia for longer, and it is possible that their perceptions towards Australia could have changed over time. For example, many survey respondents were approached during winter time in Europe that could have added to their fond memories of their time in Australia. Therefore, the results of interviewees and survey findings about students’ living, studying and travel expectations and experiences need to be viewed in the context of the time when the data was collected.

The methodological limitations associated with the present study have been discussed previously in this thesis (refer to Section 4.7) and therefore they are not repeated here extensively. Nevertheless, a limitation of dealing with the quantitative (survey) data may be that only descriptive analytical procedures were applied to the results generated from the survey questionnaire. A result of the interviews was that the only substantial differences in the decision-making among the interviewees were found between the two student groups of free-movers and exchange students. Therefore, a Mann-Whitney-U-Test was used to examine whether the mean scores of the two groups on the above dependent variables were significantly. Future research should seek to build on the initial questionnaire items and analysis techniques to develop multi-item factors (representing broader constructs) in order to undertake more advanced forms of multivariate analysis. Despite this, the conservative (descriptive) analysis techniques in this study provide a robust platform to generate future research examining the decision-making processes of international students seeking temporary education abroad.
Through including students from several Western European countries, this study achieved its aim and objectives. Therefore, it is more a delineation than a limitation of this research that it only included interviewees coming from nine and survey participants from 15 European countries. However, I want to acknowledge that there are limits to the generalisability of my study as there are evidently differences between Western European countries in relation to the various cultures, economics and educational systems in these countries. Thus, the results are only applicable to Western European students from these 15 European countries who participate in temporary mobility programs in Australia. Further research which includes students from more European countries would be desirable in the future. Despite these limitations, this research has provided a unique insight into the decision-making processes of Western European students when selecting Australia as their study abroad destination, and their living, study and travel experiences during their Australian sojourns.

8.4.2 Directions for future research

Combining the push-pull theory and the cognitive-decision-making theory in this study equipped me with an appropriate framework to explore and understand the factors which influenced European students in their decision to temporarily study abroad in Australia. Future research in the area of understanding the decision-making processes of prospective temporary international students from other smaller student market in Australia would extend this study. Specifically, further studies using these two theories in relation to international students participating in a temporary study abroad program are recommended. This is recommended because investigating the cognitive decision-making factors, including preferences, influences, knowledge and motivations of students and as well as the push and pull factors of study destinations and institutions would provide a holistic picture of the decisions of students.

This study has identified differences between temporary study abroad students and degree student. It is recommended that further data on temporary study abroad
students be gathered in order to further develop this body of research and further test the findings of this study.

It was not the intention of this study to answer questions concerning how studying abroad affected students’ personalities, intercultural competence, and academic performance. However, this study gave rise to some interesting initial findings about to students’ living experiences. To further explore students’ living experiences of their Australian sojourns would be an interesting and valuable line of enquiry in future research. Thus, a ‘follow-up’ study with a larger European student sample would be useful to confirm the research findings.

It is also recommended that future studies include the role of travel-related factors in students’ decisions and their ensuing travel behaviour to further develop this body of research and build on the findings of this study.

It is also of value for future researchers in this field to highlight that the personal contacts I made during my work as a volunteer at the several AIEC and ISANA conferences during recent years helped me to gain access to former study abroad students via people working in the international student area at Australian universities. Furthermore, while it is acknowledged that it is often difficult to maintain a sample over time, it was encouraging that all interviewees who participated in the pre-SA interview also participated in the post-SA interview a few months later. This was made possible through taking the time and making the effort to build rapport and trust with the students. Initially this was done through friendly and open email communication. Furthermore, I was willing to travel quite long distances in Germany and in Australia in order to conduct as many face-to-face interviews as possible. To me, to meet the students personally was the best way of building a relationship with them which ensured these students would be committed to giving me their time to participate in the second interview as well. Then at the interview stage, I shared my own time and knowledge through answering the students’ questions about living, studying and travelling in Australia. On reflection about the positive participant recruitment and retainment experiences of this study,
it is recommended that future studies recognise the value of taking a personalised approach to engaging with students.

Furthermore, more research focused on international students from markets other than Asia who participate in temporary as well as degree study abroad programs in Australia would be desirable in order to create a comprehensive body of knowledge in that field. Moreover, it would be interesting to explore other international student groups studying temporarily in Australia. For example, research could examine why non-award student numbers have recently decreased from the US and Germany and increased significantly from Brazil, Italy and Spain (see Chapter 2, Table 3). The current financial problems in some European countries which has resulted in reduced job opportunities for young people might push more students from Western European countries to study abroad in order to find new work opportunities.

Further research should not be limited to the international students themselves but could be expanded to look at other actors in the decision-making process. For example, the influence of information from reference groups could be further explored. Furthermore, the relationships between students and the academic adviser inside and outside of the students’ home institutions and how they could work together to better supply prospective international students with sufficient information from the early beginning of the decision-making processes would be useful. It would also be valuable to have an understanding of institutions’ experiences of hosting international students in order to understand the challenges that they may face.

In summary, this study is an initial contribution to a more in-depth and holistic understanding of European students’ decisions to temporarily study in Australia and their travel and tourism behaviours while in Australia. It has developed the literature, the push-pull theory and the CDM theory regarding international students’ decision to select the study abroad host destination and institution. The findings of this study provide marketing- and university practitioners with a deeper understanding of, for example, which information sources are utilised in their decision-making and how
important travel-related factors are in students’ decisions. In addition, through its exploration of the students’ travel behaviour, the study offers practitioners a powerful basis to develop marketing plans for attracting European students to study in Australia.

It is my hope that further studies on temporary international students studying in Australia will be undertaken with a holistic approach in order to better understand this specific student group better.
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## 10.1 Major developments in international higher education in Europe (1955–2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Aims and consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1955</strong></td>
<td>Leaders of European universities met for the first time after the Second World War</td>
<td>To reaffirm the potential of international cooperation among educational institutions in Europe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Late 1950s to 1970s** | Introduction of scholarships and exchange programs established by the British Council and the German Academic Exchange Program (DAAD)  
Introduction of European initiatives such as the ‘Joint Study Program Scheme’ (1976) | To promote student and staff mobility and research collaboration between institutions in European member states                                             |
| **1987**     | Launch of the ‘European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students’ (ERASMUS) | To promote student mobility                                                                                                                                |
| **1988**     | The first Bologna declaration signed in Italy by representatives of European higher education institutions | Confirmation of the legacy of European universities’ humanistic tradition                                                                                 |
| **1989**     | Fall of the ‘Iron Curtain’ in Germany, followed by other countries from the former ‘East bloc’ of Eastern Europe in the 1990s | Establishment of new dimensions to the internationalisation and globalisation process                                                                      |
| **1990s**    | Introduction of institutional contracts and policy statements for the higher education sectors in several European countries | Harmonising the European higher education system                                                                                                          |
| **1998**     | Sorbonne Declaration                                                    | Harmonising the European higher education system and promoting mobility for students and staff                                                            |
| **1999**     | Bologna Declaration  
Start of the transition of 46 often incompatible higher education systems to a single ‘European Higher Education Area’ | Enhancing international competitiveness, and student and academic mobility  
Promoting European cooperation in higher education quality assurance to establish a common and comparable tertiary degree credit systems to further harmonise the European higher education systems |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2013 to 2015</strong></td>
<td>The cooperative Bologna Process moved into a new phase towards creating a ‘European Higher Education Area’ (EHEA) Establishment of the ERASMUS Plus program to incorporate all former existing programs 49 countries are members of the EHEA (April 2015)</td>
<td>Focus on a reduction of the discrepancies between higher education systems in Europe to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Source: Adapted from (De Ridder-Symoens 2006; De Wit 2011; European Commission 2014)*
### 10.2 Question guide for pre-study abroad semester interview (Pre-SA interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section One – Demographic information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> What is your age, gender and nationality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> What is your current or most recent level of education?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **3** In your home country:  
  Which degree and courses are you studying and at what stage of your courses are you? |
| **4a)** Is an overseas study experience compulsory at your home university?  
**4b)** Does your university have study exchange programs with other countries? |
| **5a)** What languages do you speak?  
**5b)** How good is your level of English? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Two – Educational information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **6a)** When did you first consider studying abroad?  
**6b)** How did you first hear about your study abroad program? |
| **7** Was Australia your first choice for a study abroad program? |
| **8a)** In which Australian university are you going to be enrolled?  
**8b)** Which program and courses did you choose? |
| **9a)** What is the duration of your study program?  
**9b)** When and why did you decide to go there? |
| **10** Did you consider other universities, cities or states in Australia for your study abroad program? |
| **11** Which academic-related factors were most important in your decision? |
| **12** How influential were other people such as your family, friends, or academic advisers in your decision to study in Australia? |
| **13** Which people and/or information helped you to find the right university and courses for your semester abroad? |
| **14** How important was the support from an agency or an academic advisers for you? |
| **15** Do you have friends who will be studying with you in the same Australian university? |
| **16** Are you able to transfer all credits you will receive during your abroad semester to your degree program at home? |
| **17** Do you think studying with many other international students is an advantage or disadvantage? |
| **18** Do you have any concerns or anxieties about your planned study program in Australia? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Three – Economic factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>19</strong> Do you receive any support from your home university or from any other organisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20</strong> Do you have a scholarship or any other financial support from your host university in Australia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>21</strong> Who is supporting your study, living and travel cost while you are in Australia?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **22** Do you know anything about the living costs in Australia?  
If so, did this knowledge influence your decision? |
| **23** How much money do you calculate needing for living costs per months in Australia? |
24a) Did the opportunity to work part-time as a student influenced your decision to choose Australia as a study destination?
24b) Are you planning to work in Australia to support your costs there?
25 Are you planning to do volunteer work or an internship while you are in Australia?
26 Do you think you will get the value for the study fees or other money you will spend in Australia?

Section Four – Environmental/location factors
27 Which environmental factors, such as geographic location, climate or beaches, for example, influenced your decision to go to Australia?
28 Can you think of any other factors which have been important in making your decision?
29 What did you know about Australia and the city you will be studying before you decided to study there?
30 Did the image of Australia and the city you are going to study influence your decision?
31 Will you consider living in Australia after your study abroad semester?
32 How important were the safety issues in your study abroad decision? Is it important for you to feel safe and secure while enrolled at an overseas university?

Section Five – Tourism/travel-related factors
33a) Are you planning to visit different tourist attractions while you are in Australia?
33b) Do you already intend to travel before, during or after your abroad semester?
34 In total, how much time do you intend to spend travelling?
35 How will you find information about tourist attractions, things to do and travel opportunities in Australia?
36 Tourism wise – what do you want to do in and around the city where you will be studying?
37 How much money do you think you will spend on visiting tourist attractions and travelling around Australia?
38 What is the probability of family or friends visiting you while you are in Australia?
39 Are you expecting to find any information about trips and tours at your university?
40 Would you appreciate if your university organised tours or excursions for students during your semester?
41 Would you prefer to travel together with Australian students or other international students?

Section Six – Expectations of the Australian sojourn
42 Which are the most important benefits of studying in Australia for you?
43 What are your expectations with regards to:
   a) Your time in Australia in general
   b) Your university and course program, campus facilities and the academic skills of university staff
   c) Receiving help and support from the university, in particular, from the international office
   d) Learning about another culture and improving your English language skills
   e) Meeting new people and find friends
   f) Become more independent, develop your personality and/or enhance career opportunities
44 Do you have any other expectations about your time in Australia?
# 10.3 Question guide for post-study abroad semester interview (Post-SA interview)

## Section One - General questions
1a) How long have you been in Australia altogether?
1b) How many weeks was your study course and how much free time did you have?

2 Would you say that your English improved while you were in Australia? (If so, was it more your speaking or writing skills that improved, or both?)
   How would you rate your level of English after the semester in Australia, on a scale from 1 to 10? (10 being the highest)

## Section Two – Educational information
3a) How was the start of your study abroad semester?
3b) Did you feel welcomed at your university (did you have a good orientation and did you get all information you needed in the beginning at your host university?)

4 Did you get any travel/tourism-related information from your host university before your left your home country?

5 Were you satisfied with your experience of:
   a) Access to student support services?
   b) Support and information available on general issues (e.g. accommodation, jobs)?
   c) Help with your English skills (writing and speaking)?
   d) Academic support from your lectures and other university staff?
   e) The quality of your courses?
   f) The environment on campus and in the classroom (discussions, group work etc.)?
   g) Access to facilities at your university (library, IT, sport and social facilities)?

6 Did you finish all off your courses on time and were you satisfied with your results?

7 Did you have any study-related (academic) problems during your time and if so, did this have an impact on your leisure and travel time?

8 Do you see any advantages or disadvantages of your host university in Australia compared to your home university?

9 Do you think that your host university had a good mixture of national and international students and a good diversity of international students?

10a) Did you meet a lot of national and international students at your university?
10b) Did you make friends at the university with whom you spent leisure and travel time?

11 How was the interaction and communication between national and international students at your host university?

12 Would you recommend your host university to other students at home?

## Section Three – Economic factors
13a) Overall, were the living and travel costs in Australia what you had expected?
13b) How much money did you spend on accommodation, living costs, and tourism activities?

14 Was your time in Australia more expensive than you thought before you came here and did this affect your ability to travel?

15 Did you work in Australia or did you do any unpaid voluntary work?

## Section Four – Environmental/location factors
16 What was you experience of the following things:
   a) Being far away from home?
   b) The lifestyle in Australia?
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<tr>
<td><strong>c)</strong></td>
<td>The interaction with your host community or Australians in general?</td>
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<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td>Did you have any problems with the phenomenon of ‘culture shock’?</td>
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<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td>Has your perception of the image of Australia changed since your stay in Australia?</td>
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<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td>Have your expectations of the city or area where you studied and lived been met? Did you have different expectations to what you thought it would be like?</td>
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<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td>Would you consider living in Australia or coming back to Australia as a tourist at some stage?</td>
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<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td>In general, did you feel safe and secure during your time in Australia?</td>
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<td><strong>Section Five – Tourism and travel-related experiences</strong></td>
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<td><strong>22a)</strong></td>
<td>Did you visit different tourist attractions and did you travel while you were in Australia?</td>
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<td><strong>22b)</strong></td>
<td>If so, please tell me how much time you spent travelling and what travel/tourism-related activities you took part in before, during and after your abroad semester? Which was the main type of transport and accommodation you used, and where did you eat when travelling?</td>
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<td><strong>23a)</strong></td>
<td>How did you spend your leisure/vacation time during your semester?</td>
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<td><strong>23b)</strong></td>
<td>What did you do in and around the city you were studying?</td>
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<td><strong>24a)</strong></td>
<td>Before you came to Australia, who did you think you would spend leisure and travel time with?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>24b)</strong></td>
<td>With whom did you spend most of your leisure and travel time?</td>
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<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td>How did you find information about tourist attractions, things to do and travel opportunities?</td>
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<td><strong>26a)</strong></td>
<td>Did you find any information about trips and tours at your university?</td>
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<td><strong>26b)</strong></td>
<td>If so, did you appreciate that your university organised tours or excursions for students during your semester? Did you join any tours?</td>
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<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td>Do you think you had enough time to visit tourist attraction and to travel while you were in Australia?</td>
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<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td>Did you travel to any other countries before, during or after your SA semester?</td>
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<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td>Did any of your family members or friends visit you during your time in Australia? If so, for how long and where did they stay in Australia?</td>
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<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td>Altogether, what were your main motivations to travel in Australia? (e.g. exploring the environment/escape/fun/desire to travel in general)</td>
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<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td>What is your view on Australia as a travel destination:</td>
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<td><strong>a)</strong></td>
<td>Is it an easy and safe place to travel?</td>
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<td><strong>b)</strong></td>
<td>Are there good offers, information and IS discounts available?</td>
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<td><strong>c)</strong></td>
<td>Are accommodation and transport good and affordable?</td>
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<td><strong>d)</strong></td>
<td>Is there a variety of travel activities?</td>
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<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td>Were there any limitations and barriers preventing you from travelling more than you did in Australia? If so, please explain (e.g. lack of time, money or information; safety or security concerns/no student packages or discounts)</td>
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<td><strong>33a)</strong></td>
<td>From your overall experience how important was the travel part of it?</td>
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<td><strong>33b)</strong></td>
<td>Would you have come to Australia to study here only and not combining study with travelling?</td>
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<td><strong>Section Six – Experiences of study abroad semester in Australia</strong></td>
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<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td>What were the most important benefits of studying in Australia for you?</td>
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<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td>Were your expectations met in regards to:</td>
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<td><strong>a)</strong></td>
<td>Your time in Australia in general?</td>
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<td><strong>b)</strong></td>
<td>Learning about another culture?</td>
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| **d)** Meeting new people and making friends which you spent leisure and travel time with?  
   **e)** Becoming more independent?  
   Any other expectations you had? |
| **36.** Overall, what was your most favourite and least favourite part of your abroad experience? |
| **37a)** Would you change anything about the way you decided to study in Australia and your preparations to come to Australia?  
   **37b)** Is there anything you wish you would have known before you came to Australia? |
| **38** Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your overall experience in Australia? |
| **39** If you had to describe your overall abroad experience in a few words, what would you say? |
|   | If I have any follow-up questions would it be okay if I contact you again via Email?  
   Do you want me to send you the interview transcripts? |
### 10.4 Overview of interviewees demographics

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**Note:** \(\checkmark\)=Yes; \(\checkmark\)=Yes but with reservations; \(\times\)=No
### 10.5 Code table as extracted from NVivo file

#### Pre-SA interview

**Considerations, influences & information sources**

**First heard about study abroad in Australia from:**
- Family, friends, and social network
- Information from different sources
- Internet
- Sources at home university – external academic adviser
- Sources at home university – internal academic adviser
- Sources within home country but outside from university - external advisers

**Decision made to SA in general**
- Beginning of university
- When still at high school
- Recently

**Decision made to SA in Australia**
- A year or more before start of SA semester
- Less than a year before start of SA semester

**Influences at consideration stage**
- Academic advisers
- Educational agency
- Friends or family
- My own decision, no influence
- Others

**Information about host universities and courses**
- Academic advisers from home university
- Advice from former SA students
- Educational agency in home country
- Host university website or presentation
- Others, Exchange program
- Searched on my own on universities websites

**Considered other choices of host country and university**
- No, did not consider other choices
- Yes, considered other choices

**Knowledge about Australia and host cities before decision to SA there**
- Course credit recognition
- Credits recognition unclear before SA
- Had knowledge about Australia
- Had knowledge about host city
- Had no knowledge about host city
- Had only little knowledge about Australia
- Had only little knowledge about host city
- Knowledge about expensive costs in Australia

#### Decision to study abroad in Australia/host university

**Academic-related factors**
- Academic factors did not influenced my decision at all
- Choice and variety of courses
- Exchange program availability (not much choice)
- Experience a different educational system
- Facilities and support for IS
Improvement of academic English skills
Less study fees than other Australian universities
Location and environment of university
Recognition of courses at home university
Reputation, high academic standard of university
Semester time compatible with home degree

**Environmental/climate/location factors**

- Being far away from home
- Climate factors
  - Escape winter in Europe
  - Weather, warm climate
- Enjoying outdoor activities
- Environmental factors did not influence me
- Living close to the beach
- Living in a new, different environment
- Experience a different nature, fauna and, or animals
- Size of Australia

**Financial factors**

- Exchange program, no study fees
- Get value for money spent
- Receiving financial support
- Less living costs than in other areas in Australia
- Less study fees than in other English-speaking countries
- Work opportunity influenced decision

**Other factors**

- Considering living or studying in Australia after SA
- Image of Australia
- Image of Australia did not influenced me
- Image of study city
- Importance of safety
- Other factors

**Socio-cultural factors**

- Cultural experience
- Enhance my personality
- Experience a multi-cultural environment
- Experience the lifestyle in Australia
- Friends studying with them
- Going to an English-speaking/Western country
- Image of Australian people
- Image of 'laid-back', easy-going-lifestyle
- Meeting new people from around the world

**Travel- & tourism-related factors**

- Combine study with travelling

---

**Planning process – before going to Australia**

**Information and preparations received before going to Australia**

**Travel plans before leaving**

- Tourist activities around study area
- Travel information from host university
- Search for travel information

**Expectation before going**

- Academic expectations before
- Enhances my career, good for my CV
- Expectation of general support from host university before starting SA semester
Having a good and fun time
Most important benefits of SA, before
Other expectation, before
Personal changes
Risk or anxieties before SA
Studying with many IS
To learn about another culture before
To meet people, find friends to travel with before
Value for money

**Post-SA interview**

**Expectations met (after SA)**

Did not have any expectations of Australia or the study (host) city
Expectations of host city met
Expectations of host city not met
General expectation was not met
General expectation was met
Learn about a new culture & meet new people
Other expectations (after SA)
Perception of image of Australia
Personal changes (after SA)
Overall experiences (after SA)
Being far away from home
Changing preparation of SA
Experience of lifestyle in Australia
Interaction with Australians
Least favourite part
Most favourite part
Most important benefits after SA
Other experiences
Short description of SA experience

**Experiences in Australia**

**Study experiences**

Academic English language support
Academic support - not satisfied
Academic support - satisfied
Comparing home & host university
Environment in class & on campus - satisfied
Environment in class & on campus - not satisfied
General support, not satisfied
General support, satisfied
Interaction between national and IS
Mixture of students & diversity among IS
Recommend host university
Start & orientation not satisfied
Start & orientation satisfied
Study-related problems

**Travel experiences**

Australia as a travel destination/accommodation & transport while travelling
Good travel offers and information
Travel information and offers from host university

Importance of travel

Information tools
  No travel information and offers from host university

Leisure activities during the study time

Limitations to travel

Motivations to travel
  Exploring Australia
  Other travel motivations
  To relax, have fun, escape from university

Travel activities

Travel and leisure partners
  IS or other students met at university
  Travelled with others, not students
10.6 Survey questionnaire as extracted from Qualtrics

Default Question Block

Information for survey participants

Dear student,

My name is Sabine Muschter and I am a PhD candidate at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Southern Cross University, Australia. As part of my research project I am conducting a study into the decision-making process of European International students to study abroad in Australia and their travel behaviour during their stay in Australia.

As a former study abroad student in Australia I am inviting you to participate in this study. I am interested in your planning and decision-making process before you came to Australia, and your opinions and experiences while you were living and travelling in Australia. Your participation in this study is very important. Sharing your experiences will lead to a better understanding of European study abroad students, which will assist improved service to international students in Australia.

The survey should take you approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. If you need to exit the survey simply close it, your answer will be saved, allowing you to return and complete within two weeks.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Your confidentiality:

If you complete this survey, please be assured that only the researcher will access the information. All information gathered from you will be treated confidentially and anonymously. All material from the survey will be kept on a password protected computer and any printed materials in a locked filing cabinet.

The results of this study will be implemented in the research thesis and may be presented at conferences or published in a peer-reviewed journal later on.

Contact:

Should you require any further information regarding this study please, feel free to email us:
Researcher: Sabine Muschter, PhD student, Southern Cross University
School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, (s.muschter.10@scu.edu.au)
Supervisor: Dr. Mieke Witsel, Lecturer, Southern Cross University
School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, (m.ieke.witsel@scu.edu.au)

The ethical conduct of this research:

This research adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of Southern Cross University. The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Ethics approval number is: ECN-12-093

If complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:
Ethics Complaints Officer; HREC, SCU, PO Box 167, Lismore, NSW, 2480; Email: ethic.compl@scu.edu.au.

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in HR and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

First, I would like to ask a few general questions about you.

What is your age?

________________________

What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

Appendices 332
What is your nationality?

From your overall time in Australia - how long was...?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approximate number of weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your study abroad semester</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your leisure and/or travel time before or after your semester</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your time in any paid or unpaid work (e.g. Volunteer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What type of Australian visa did you have? *(Tick only one option)*

- Student visa
- Working Holiday visa
- Student visa and tourist visa after my study
- Other

Next, could you please give some information about your home university.

In which university (or educational institution), degree and year are you enrolled in your home country? *(e.g. University of Barcelona, Bachelor of Art, Year 3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Is an overseas study experience compulsory in your degree at your home university?

- Yes
- No

Does your home university have study exchange-programs in your degree with universities abroad?

- Yes
- No

Please select from the following options. *(Tick only one option)*

Your home university has exchange-programs in your degree with universities:

- Only in European countries
- In other countries, but not in Australia
- In other countries, including Australia
In this section, I would like to ask you about the decision-making process of your study abroad program in Australia. These questions are really important for the research, so please take your time to read and answer them carefully.

When did you first consider studying abroad? *(Tick only one option)*
- [ ] During my school years
- [ ] In the beginning of my university study
- [ ] During my university study
- [ ] Other (please specify)

How did you first hear about your study abroad program in Australia? *(e.g. a friend told me about it, my university had an information day)*

How many months before arriving in Australia did you apply for your study abroad semester in Australia?

Was Australia your first choice for a study abroad program?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Which country was your first choice for a study abroad program?

Please explain briefly why you did not go there.

First choice for study abroad

Reason for not going there

Where have you been enrolled during your study abroad program in Australia?

University:

Campus:

How did you participate in your study abroad program in Australia? *(Tick only one option)*
- [ ] As an exchange student (paid no study fees in Australia)
- [ ] As a free mover (paid study fees in Australia)

How much information did you have before you applied to study abroad in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No information</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>Very much information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the city/area where you lived</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendices
To what extent, if at all, did you use the following information sources in your decision:

a) to study abroad in Australia and
b) to select your Australian university?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The academic advisers from my home university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education agencies for studying in Australia in my home country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family or friends, who have been in Australia before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My fellow students, who studied in Australia before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My previous travels to Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The academic advisers from Australian universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites about study abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites from Australian universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs and Alumni networks from former study abroad students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers, magazines or books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How strongly would you agree or disagree that the following academic factors influenced your decision:

a) to study abroad in Australia and
b) to select your Australian university?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The reputation of the Australian higher education system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The range and quality of university courses available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The choice of courses which I could not study at my home university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The existing exchange program with my home university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application process for a study abroad program and a student visa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations from friends, family and friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advice from education agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The facilities and services offered for international students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The semester time in Australia was compatible with my semester time at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The location of my host university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lower cost of study fees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendices
How strongly would you agree or disagree that the following environmental factors influenced your decision to study abroad in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors influencing my decision</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The geographic location of Australia</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a warmer climate than at home</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live close to the beach</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live in a multicultural environment</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image of an &quot;easy-going lifestyle&quot; in Australia</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to do things I cannot do in my home country (e.g. surfing)</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How strongly would you agree or disagree that the following factors were important in your decision to study abroad in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors considered important for my decision</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To have a &quot;real abroad&quot; experience, and not be able to go home during my study abroad</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get all my Australian course credits recognised at my home university</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The desire to broaden my academic experiences and horizons</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my English skills</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand myself better</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enhance my career opportunities</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live in a country I would probably never visit otherwise</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spend time in Australia again as I have been here before</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to work as a student</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To experience Australia to see if I want to live there in the future</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to explore and travel in Australia</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How strongly would you agree or disagree that
a) before you left home you imagined experiencing the following difficulties during your stay in Australia and how strongly would you agree or disagree that
b) you actually experienced these difficulties, once you were in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Before arriving in Australia, I imagined difficulties</th>
<th>b) During my stay in Australia, I actually experienced difficulties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing my study costs</td>
<td>Financing my living and travel costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with the climate or natural disaster (e.g. floods)</td>
<td>Adapting to a new lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a place to live</td>
<td>Getting around in a new environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
<td>○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling all requirements for my...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How strongly would you agree or disagree that
a) before you left home you expected the following to occur during your stay in Australia and
b) the following actually occurred during your stay in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Before I came to Australia I expected to</th>
<th>b) During my stay in Australia I did</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>university courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding ethnic and cultural differences in Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding friends I can spend leisure and travel time with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Improve my English skills | | | | | | | | | |
| Improve aspects of my personality (more confident, independent) | | | | | | | | | |
| Meet and spend time with Australian students | | | | | | | | | |
| Meet and spend time with international students | | | | | | | | | |
| Meet other Australian people | | | | | | | | | |
| Get a good value for the money I spent on higher living and / or study costs | | | | | | | | | |
| Learn about a new culture and lifestyle | | | | | | | | | |

This section contains questions about tourism opportunities and your travel experiences during your stay in Australia.

Note:
"Leisure activities" refers to the range of activities you did during your study abroad stay in and around your host city or area (e.g. shopping, going to the movies).

"Travel activities" or "travelling" refers to all tourism Related activities you did in Australia where you spent at least one night or more away from the area where you studied and lived in Australia (e.g. going on a two day trip to Fraser Island).

How often, if at all, did you do any of the following leisure activities in and around the place where you studied?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I did these leisure activities</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Not often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sightseeing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities (e.g. going to beaches, parks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport activities (such as surfing, hiking, cycling)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping for pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment activities (e.g. going to restaurants, bars, movies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting friends and fellow students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities which were organised by my university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did your Australian university provide any information and / or offers about leisure or travel opportunities in Australia and did you participate in any offers from your host university?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My university provided</th>
<th>I used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How strongly would you agree or disagree that you found the following sources useful in your search for travel offers in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did not use</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did any of your family members or friends from your home country visit you while you were in Australia?

- Yes
- No

How many of your friends or family members came to visit you in Australia and approximately, how long in total did they stay?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many people visited you?</th>
<th>How long in total did they stay in Australia (in weeks)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends, who visited me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members, who visited me</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you have plans to travel during your stay in Australia before you left home and did you eventually do any travelling while you were in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had plans to travel in Australia before I left my home country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I travelled in Australia.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please list the two longest travel tours during your overall study abroad stay in Australia.
(e.g. Trip 1: East coast from Cairns to Sydney)

Tour 1: My longest trip was:
Tour 2: My second longest trip was:

Please answer the following questions for your longest trip in Australia by filling in the applicable number. (e.g. Tour 1 was: 4=over 4 weeks; 3=during my semester; 1=I mainly stayed in hostels...)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour 1 - your longest trip</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The tour was: 1. Less than a week 2. Between 1-2 weeks 3. Between 2-4 weeks 4. over 4 weeks.
The tour was: 1. Before my semester 2. During my semester 3. During my semester break 4. After my semester.
On this tour I mainly stayed: 1. In hostels 2. On camp grounds 3. In caravan parks 4. In motels or hotels 5. Other.
During this tour: 1. I mainly ate out 2. I mainly cooked for myself.

| How important were the following factors to motivate you to travel in Australia? |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------- |
|                                 | Not important   | Slightly        | Moderately      | Quite           | Very important  |
| To explore and learn about the Australian environment, culture and/or people |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| To escape from study           |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| To escape from the city or the area where I lived in Australia |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| To relax and have fun          |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| To spend time with friends or other students |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| I liked to travel to places that I have not visited before |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| To be able to talk about my travel experience with friends and family at home |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |

| How much do you agree or disagree that in Australia...? |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------- |
|                                                          | Strongly disagree| Disagree        | Neutral         | Agree           | Strongly agree  |
| It is easy to travel                                     |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| It is safe to travel                                     |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| There are good travel offers and information available    |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| There are good international student travel discounts available |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| To travel is affordable                                  |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Accommodation offers for travellers are good             |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Transport opportunities for travellers are good          |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| There is a good variety of travel activities to choose from |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |

To what extent did you experience any limitations or barriers to travel more than you actually did during your stay in Australia?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Limitation</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Very much</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information about tours and trips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety or security concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No student packages or discounts available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More study commitments than I thought</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>More work commitments than I thought</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify or tick Not at all)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How important was the travel part of your overall Australian experience? *(Tick only one option)*

- [ ] Not important
- [ ] Slightly important
- [ ] Moderately important
- [ ] Important
- [ ] Very important

Do you think you would have come to Australia only to study, if you did not have time to travel at all? *(Tick only one option)*

- [ ] Definitely not
- [ ] Probably not
- [ ] Maybe
- [ ] Probably yes
- [ ] Definitely yes

Who financed your study fees, living and travel costs in Australia? *(Tick one or more boxes)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study fees</th>
<th>Living costs</th>
<th>Costs for leisure or travel activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funded (e.g., own savings, working in Australia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from home government or home university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from host university in Australia</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please answer the following questions in your own words. You can write as little or as much as you like.

Which were the most important benefits for you studying in Australia? *(Please list a maximum of three benefits)*

Is there anything you wish you would have known before you came to Australia?

If you had to describe your overall study abroad experience in Australia to someone in just a few words or sentences, what would you say?

Do you have anything else you would like to share regarding your overall study, living and/or travel experience in Australia?
## 10.7 Mann-Whitney-U-Test

### Test Statistics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>How many months before arriving in Australia did you apply for your study abroad semester in Australia</th>
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<th>SMEAN(Q22_3)</th>
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a. Grouping Variable: How did you participate in your study abroad program in Australia? (Tick only one option)
Extracted from above list: Differences in answers between free-movers and exchange students

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Z-score</th>
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<td>To what extent, if at all, did you use the following information sources in your decision:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) To study abroad in Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>The academic advisers from my home country</td>
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<td>Education agencies for studying in Australia in my home country</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) To select your Australian university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-2.448</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
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<td>Websites about study abroad</td>
<td>-2.680</td>
<td>.007</td>
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<td>How strongly would you agree or disagree that the following academic factors influenced your decision:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) To study abroad in Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The existing exchange program with my home university</td>
<td>-11.641</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>The advice from education agencies</td>
<td>-5.088</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>How strongly would you agree or disagree that the following academic factors influenced your decision:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) To select your Australian university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The existing exchange program with my home university</td>
<td>-11.399</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>The application process for a SA-program and a student visa</td>
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<td>.010</td>
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<td>The advice from education agencies</td>
<td>-5.611</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>How strongly would you agree or disagree that the following environmental factors influenced your decision to SA in Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>To have a warmer climate</td>
<td>-2.616</td>
<td>.009</td>
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</table>

Note: ^ Grouping Variable: How did you participate in your study abroad program in Australia? (Tick only one option, As an exchange student/As a free-mover)
10.8 Interview information sheet

Dear ____________,

My name is Sabine Muschter and I am a PhD candidate at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Southern Cross University, Australia.

I am conducting a study to understand the decision-making process of European international students to study abroad in Australia and their travel behaviour during their stay in Australia.

As a future study abroad student in Australia I am inviting you to participate in this study. The study involves two separate interviews: The first interview will be conducted before your departure to Australia. The second interview will take place at your own convenience either towards the end of your study in Australia or when you are back in your home country.

What the projects involves:
This research involves participation in a face-to-face, Skype or telephone interview which will each take around 30-45 minutes. Involvement in the interviews is on a voluntary basis. You are free to ask questions and to withdraw at any time without providing any explanation. The interview will be conducted at a convenient place and time to you and at no cost to you. It will be digitally recorded with your permission.

Interview questions will ask about your decision-making process to study abroad in Australia. Questions will ask which institutional, economic or environment factors influenced your decision most. Furthermore, I would like to investigate your expectation and plans for tourism-related activities during your stay in Australia.

Confidentiality:
All information gathered from you will be treated confidentially and anonymously.

All data presented in the final thesis will be de-identified to protect your privacy and identity. In addition, all material and transcripts from the interview will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet. To ensure your data has been accurately reflected by the researcher, your transcribed interviews will be offered to you for confirmation and approval.

The results of this study will be published in the research thesis and may be presented at conferences or published in a peer-reviewed journals later on.

Should you require any further information regarding this study please, feel free to contact us by email or telephone.
Ethical conduct:
This research adheres to the guidelines of the ethical review process of Southern Cross University. The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

The approval number is: ECN-11-071

If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the HREC through the Ethics Complaints Officer:

Ms Sue Kelly
The Ethics Complaint Officer and Secretary, HREC
Southern Cross University
P.O. Box 157, Lismore, NSW 2480
Phone: + 61 2 6626 9139
Fax: + 61 26626 9145
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Sabine Muschter
10.9 Interview Consent Form

Title of research project: “Understanding the decision-making process of European international students to study abroad in Australia and their travel behaviour during their stay in Australia.”

Name of Researcher: Sabine Muschter

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Mieke Witsel

(Contact details of the researcher and the supervisor are contained in the information sheet about this research)

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Southern Cross University researcher for their records.

Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above. Yes ☐ No ☐

I have been provided with information at my level of comprehension about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences and possible outcomes of this research, including any likelihood and form of publication of results. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to allow the interview to be audiotaped. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that I can choose not to participate in part or all of this research at any time, without negative consequence to me. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that any information that may identify me, will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. Therefore, any information that I have provided cannot be linked to me (Privacy Act 1988 Cth). Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that neither my name nor any identifying information will be disclosed or published. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that all information gathered in this research is confidential. It will be kept securely and confidentially for 7 years at the University. Yes ☐ No ☐
I am aware that I can contact the supervisor or researcher at any time with any queries.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that the ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics approval number: ECN-11-071).  Yes ☐  No ☐

If I have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research, I understand that I can contact the SCU Ethics Complaints Officer.  Yes ☐  No ☐

Participant name: __________________________________________

Participant signature: ____________________________

Date: ___________________
### Research participants’ nationalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home country</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th></th>
<th>Survey respondents</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTRIA</td>
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<td>3 (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRITAIN</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5 (3%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BULGARIA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DANMARK</td>
<td>4 (14%)</td>
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<td>19 (10%)</td>
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<td>FRANCE</td>
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<td>6 (3%)</td>
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<td>GERMANY</td>
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<td>ICELAND</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRELAND</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1 (1%)</td>
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<td>ITALY</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
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<td>12 (6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NETHERLAND</td>
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<td>NORWAY</td>
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<td>19 (10%)</td>
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<td>ROMANIA</td>
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<td>SCOTLAND</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWEDEN</td>
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<td>14 (7%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
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<td><strong>All Participants:</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
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<td><strong>194</strong></td>
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